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The Autocrat of the Nursery

L. T. Meade.

Illustrations by T. Pym.


THE AUTOCRAT OF THE NURSERY.
NELL
HARRY
DICK
JACK
CHARLIE

THE AUTOCRAT OF THE NURSERY

ILLUSTRATIONS BY T. PYM

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"NOW BE SO GOOD AS TO LISTEN"

Autocrat of the Breakfast Table.

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THE

AUTOCRAT OF THE NURSERY.

BY

L. T. MEADE,

AUTHOR OF "HOW IT ALL CAME ROUND," "SCAMP AND I,"
"HERMIE'S ROSEBUDS," ETC.

With Forty Illustrations by T. Pym.

"Love was once a little Boy,
Heigho! Heigho!"

London:
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2527. e. 19

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Dedicated

TO MY LITTLE SON AND DAUGHTER,

ALFIE AND HOPE.

October, 1884.

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CHAPTER I.

THE NURSERY.

"Now be so good as to listen."
"Autocrat of the Breakfast Table.'

"Little flowers that open gay,
Peeping forth at break of day.'
Jane Taylor.

THE nursery was a long, low room. It faced south, and whenever there was any sun at all, that sun streamed in at its pretty lattice windows. Round the windows creepers twined,—jasmine, monthly roses, and a fine arm of the beautiful violet-flowered wisteria.

Far, far away, at another part of the old house, the root, trunk, and original part of the tree were to be found; but this special branch was enterprising, and having spread itself out in a southerly direction, it discovered the nursery windows, which it protected in quite a pretty way.

When the little ones peeped out of these windows, so much greenery surrounded them, that they looked something like young birds gazing out of nests.

The rest of the room was old-fashioned and cosy. The walls were papered, not with any modern device, but with odds and ends of pictures. These pictures were put together in a quaint and not ungraceful fashion, and would have revealed a perfect history on the gradual growth and improvement of woodcuts, and illustrations generally, to an intelligent observer. The coarsest

outlines were to be seen on these walls, also dainty and highly-finished modern instances of art. The three windows which faced the long room contained each a deep seat, into which the little ones could nestle.

On a wet day more than one small figure would climb into these



"LIKE YOUNG BIRDS GAZING OUT OF NESTS."

seats, and more than one dismal little face would be pressed against the lattice panes—or, supposing the day were fine, eager feet would jump up and down on the well-worn cushions, and happy eyes would gaze longingly out at the flowers and sunshine.

There was a great cupboard in the room, which contained cups and saucers at the top, and the children's toys underneath, and

there were many little chairs of different sizes and patterns, and a comfortable deep rocking-chair for nurse.

There was also the square nursery dining-table, and another useful table with drawers in it; but besides these things, the nursery did not contain much furniture. "All the better," as Jack expressed it, "for play"—all the more room for rampant games of ball and for successful somersaults.

Beyond the day nursery was the night nursery.



"Only just a bedroom for us little children to sleep in," rosy-faced Nell said.

Nurse was very kind and motherly; the under-nurse was a merry and good-tempered girl, and altogether four happier little children than those who lived in these nurseries could not be found in England.

Four little children, did I say? Nay, five inhabited these pleasant rooms, and it is about the fifth child, and the last to arrive, that this story means principally to tell.

The four children who were born in the house, and had always lived in the nursery, with its three southerly windows, who had,

those of them who were old enough, seen the wisteria come into flower spring after spring, who had played in the gardens, and run wildly about the paddocks, were called Jack, Harry, Nell, and Dick. They had honest English names, and were, like their names, honest English children.

They were honourable, and I don't think any of them would have stooped to tell a lie. They were also brave, and had no small meannesses—one little boy would never screen himself from a well-merited punishment at the expense of another, and the three boys were chivalrous and tender to the one girl.

In this description I include the baby, Dick, who was but eight months old, and who could therefore only express his honourable soul in his honourable English face, and his truthful spirit in his clear baby eyes.

But though the children were nice and bright and happy, though their father and mother thought them quite the sweetest children in the world, they were not in reality anything remarkable; they were just like other thousands and tens of thousands of tenderly cared-for little ones.

They had no very serious faults, but they had heaps of little ones. Nell was hopelessly untidy—Harry found it extremely difficult to be obedient—Jack was sadly idle—and even the baby would not sleep when he ought to at night. Still, as I said, they were all very like other children, and this story would never have been written but for something which occurred, and quite suddenly turned the nursery topsy-turvy.



CHAPTER II.

"I WONDER DOES HE LIKE DOLLS."

"In that modest dwelling we were just looking at, not glorious, yet not unlovely in the youth of its drab and mahogany,—full of great and little boys' playthings from top to bottom,—in these summer or winter nests he was . . . welcome."—*"Autocrat of the Breakfast Table."*



THIS something was the arrival of the fifth child.

One afternoon, little Nell, who possessed a large amount of curiosity, and who had followed nurse into the night nursery, came back with a very important face.

"I has got a secret," she said, addressing Jack and Harry.

Little Nell was five years old; she could very nearly speak quite plain, and she now proceeded to inform her two brothers, who were both her seniors, that nurse was busy putting up a new cot in the night nursery. "It has brass rails," said wise Nell, "and darling little goldy balls at each corner—and it's big, but not very big, and I do wonder who 'tis for."

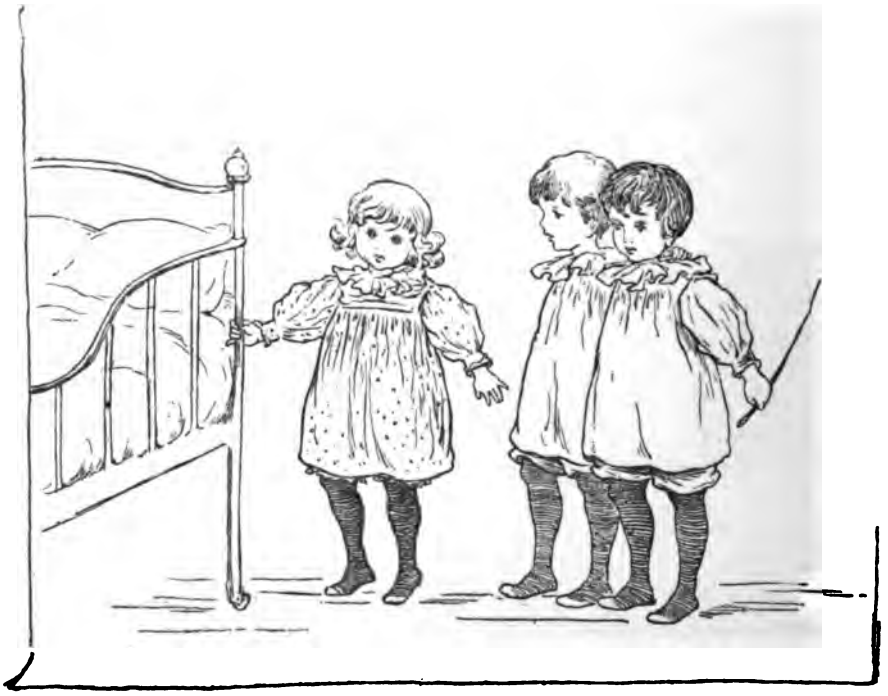
Jack and Harry followed Nell into the night nursery; they all three walked on tip-toe, as they were very much afraid of nurse finding them out.

There stood the new cot, with its brass rungs and white little bed, all ready to sleep upon inside.

Jack tested its strength by swinging himself on to one of the corner posts, and then nurse discovered the children, and sent them back, to be under the nursemaid's care, and said they

must wait patiently, to hear the story of the new cot, until mother came.

Mother always spent an hour with her children every evening —she saw them of course many times during the day, but this special hour was devoted to them alone. Mother had a young



"THERE STOOD THE NEW COT."

face—love seemed always to look out of her soft eyes, and the smiles round her lips were so tender and so sweet, that they would win the heart of any little child in the world. She was a wise mother too, and could restrain with a look, and lead her little band with silken cords.

Nurse's face, which could not help sometimes appearing slightly worried, always grew smooth and restful when mother arrived. However disorderly the children had been but a moment before, they now instantly became good—quarrels were made up, disputes forgotten. Mother could romp with the wildest, could laugh with the merriest, could be everybody's confidant and everybody's counsellor. On this special evening, Harry drew nurse's rocking-chair into the snuggest corner, and when Mrs. Humphrey appeared, three out of the four made a raid upon her, dragged her over to the chair, pushed her down, and then exclaimed in a medley of excitement and interest, "The story of the cot—tell us why the new cot is in the nursery. Nurse said you'd tell us, mother."

"Mother, 'tis a darling cot, and it has got goldy balls," exclaimed Nell. "And I swung on it, and nurse turned me out of the room," continued Jack.

"And oh! mother, who *is* it for?" said all three again in a breathless chorus.

"I must have my baby on my knee before I can tell you anything," answered mother. "Nurse, give me the precious pet."

"Eh! what impatient little bodies!" said nurse. "I hope, ma'am, you'll be able to satisfy them, or there will be sleep for none of us to-night."

Mother kissed baby Dick, smiled at the other three, and then said:

"The new cot is for Charlie."

"Charlie!" exclaimed Nell.

"Our little cousin Charlie?" asked Jack.

"Oh! mother, *is* it the little boy who always lives in London, and whom we have none of us ever seen?" demanded Harry, his cheeks very red, and his eyes round with excitement.

"He is your little cousin—and his home is in London, and you have none of you ever seen him," replied Mrs. Humphrey. "He is quite a little boy, younger than any of you, except baby Dick—he is only a very little over three years old, and his coming here is rather sad—and I want you all to be so kind to him."

"Oh! I am sorry he's such a baby," said Jack; "we wanted a big boy, as big as ourselves, didn't we, Harry?"

Jack and Harry were twins, and their ages were between six and seven—they always echoed each other's remarks, and followed each other about, and were always good together, and naughty together—in mischief at the same time—model boys on the same day.

"But why is it sad about Charlie's coming?" questioned Nell, through whose quick little mind instantly flashed the thought, that here might be somebody for her to patronise—Jack and Harry being in her opinion rather old boys, and Dick 'quite a little baby, you know."

"Why is it sad about him, mother? Please do tell me, mother."

"He is coming a long way from home, and this is the first time he has ever left home," said mother, "and the reason is sad, because his own mother is ill, and has been ordered to go to a warm country for the winter; and she cannot take her little boy with her, so he is coming to us—and I want you to be very good to him, and very loving, and all of you to try to make him happy."

"I wonder does he like dolls?" asked Nell. "I have four, you know—Alice, and Seraphina, and Topsy, and Anna-Maria Jones. He may have Anna-Maria Jones, if I can only mend her leg first; all the bran does bleed out so dreadfully, and I'm 'fraid 'twill make a mess and ——"

"He's a boy; he don't want dolls," interrupted Harry. "When is he coming, mother?"

"We expect him to-night,—quite late to-night, when you are all asleep," answered mother. "That is a kind thought, Nell darling, about the doll, and if you give her to me, I will mend the leg myself. I am afraid I must leave you now, dears. Yes, this is a very, very short mother's hour; but I am going with father in the carriage to meet little Charlie."

CHAPTER III.

THE LITTLE BOY IN THE NEW COT.

"The blessed little creature answered me in a voice of such heavenly sweetness, with that reedy thrill in it which you have heard in the thrush's evensong, that I hear it at this moment."

"Autocrat of the Breakfast Table."

NURSE had rather a troublesome time as she put the children to bed that night. They were all considerably excited about Charlie, and could think and talk of no one else.

Jack and Harry said it was a sad pity he was such a baby.

"He'll be nothing of a playfellow for us," they said one to another.

"He is only three years old, and of course, coming from London, he can't be much of a boy. I shouldn't be much surprised," added Jack, shaking his head wisely, "if he had never even *seen* rabbits."

"But he may have gone to the Zoo," said Harry. "Father says there are all kinds of animals at the Zoo; so I suppose rabbits will be there with the rest. He may have gone there, though he is so young—still it is a pity he is not a bit bigger, for it would have been nice to have had a third boy to play with."

Little Nell, however, in her secret heart was pleased at Charlie's extreme youth. Little Nell was sometimes just the wee'st bit in the world lonely—Jack and Harry being all in all to each other, and baby Dick quite too young to play with.

"The big boys," as she termed them, were always very kind to their little sister; but when she went to spend a long afternoon with her mother, they never said on her return, "We have missed you, Nell." They let her go without sorrow, and they saw her come back without rejoicing. Sometimes, too, when she asked to share their secrets they said, "Oh! you are only a girl." At these times little Nell would have had a bad time of it were it not for Seraphina and Anna-Maria Jones, and the other dolls.

Now she thought with a feeling of great satisfaction of the child, who, though a boy, was still little more than a baby, and who must, therefore, depend a great deal upon her. She planned delightful plays, all by herself, with Charlie. Even if he did not succumb to the sweetness of Seraphina's everlasting simper, they could play ball and ninepins together. Nell could play ball and ninepins very well indeed, and no little boy of only three years old, however manly he might turn out to be, could despise such games as these.

So Nell went to bed with a happy heart, and when she said her prayers, she added a little "thank you" to God in a whisper. This was Nell's thanksgiving,—

"*I am so much obliged to you for sending the little baby boy Charlie—I'm so glad he is quite a little young boy for me to play with.*"

Then all the children got into their cots, and nurse tucked them up and kissed them and blessed them, and put the night-light in its usual place in the corner, and then the door was shut, and they could hear her voice, far away in the day nursery, chattering to the nursemaid Annie, or caressing baby Dick.

The new cot was still empty—it stood between Harry's cot and Nell's; but it was quite close to Harry's and a good little distance from Nell's. She could see it, however, without any difficulty, for the night-light gleamed on its brass rails and on the little balls on the top which Nell called "goldy." She could see its snowy draperies, its sheets turned down, and its little pillow waiting so invitingly for the head which was to press it by-and-bye.

The two boys talked for a short time, but soon dropped asleep;

and Nell, though she would have liked to stay awake, was forced against her will to follow their example.

She slept what seemed many hours, and when at last she opened her eyes with a start, she thought it must surely be morning. The night nursery was full of light and movement. Nurse was bustling about with a very important air—the fire was burning brightly in the grate; by the fire in an easy-chair sat mother, and in mother's arms lay a little boy fast asleep. He had a lot of goldy curls very thick and tangled, hanging down his back—his face was dazzlingly fair, his cheeks rosy. Nell, sitting up in bed, could see this. She also saw that he was dressed in a dark velvet suit. She lay down again with a satisfied sigh—he was very pretty, and he was quite a baby boy.

Watching through the rails of her little cot, she saw nurse take off his shoes and stockings, remove his little garments one by one, put on a snowy-frilled nightdress, which had been airing by the fire, and then mother, lifting him in her own arms, laid him tenderly, still sleeping, into the new cot.

Nell did not dare to say she was awake. Mother went out of the room, nurse brought in baby Dick, and went to bed herself, and silence reigned over all.

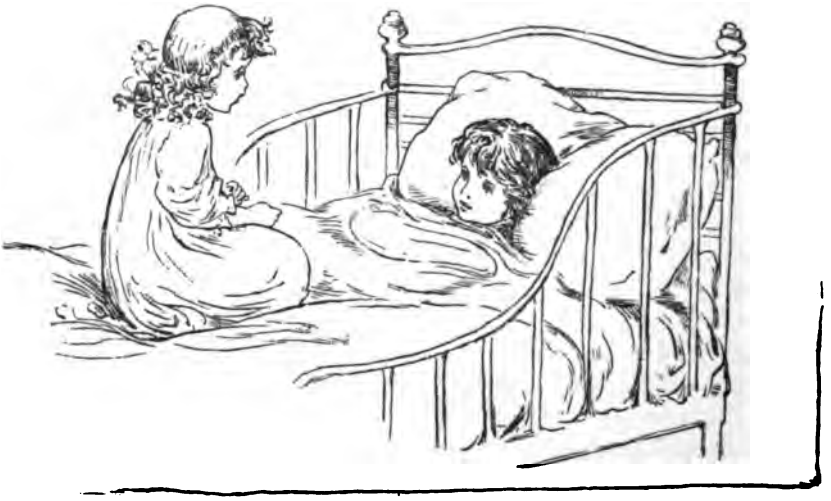
The rest of the night seemed very short to Nell after this, and when she opened her eyes and saw that morning had really come, she felt much surprised.

Jack and Harry, who always slept soundly and never awoke until the last moment, were still lying perfectly quiet; but nurse was moving about, and, most exciting of all, the little boy in the new cot had opened his eyes and was sitting up in bed. He was gazing about him in a puzzled, but by no means a frightened, way; and Nell, who felt her heart in her mouth, and was about to speak, was suddenly interrupted. The words were stayed on her lips by the remarkable conduct of this strange little boy. Never bestowing even a glance on Nell's crib, he stood upright in his own, a smile broke all over his round baby face, and the next instant he had tumbled head over heels right on top of Harry, who was snoring rather loudly.

"Hullo, old fellow!" said Harry, waking with a start and breathing rather hard—for the bump he had received was sharp and sudden—"what do you mean by this?"

"Why, I thought you was musser," answered a high-pitched little voice.

"Well, don't think so again—you're rather heavy for a small chap. So you're the new little fellow we were expecting last night?"



"HULLO, OLD FELLOW!"

"I are Tarlie. Wasn't it well I didn't ky?"

Jack was now awake, and Nell in her excitement had crept right out of her own bed, and was kneeling in her nightdress with her little face pressed against the rails of Harry's crib.

"Wasn't it well I didn't ky?" repeated Charlie, who had got astride of Harry's chest, and was sitting there at his ease.

"I don't know what you'd cry for," said Harry.

"What a funny little chap!" echoed Jack.

"Why, I thought you was musser, and you're nussing but big boy. I didn't ky, 'cause I are man. I'll be taller nor you when I'se g'own up."

"Will you, indeed?" answered Harry good-humouredly; but both the boys were charmed with the little fellow, devoting themselves to him, drawing him out, and pealing with laughter at his remarks.

Nell felt subdued. She went back quietly to her own crib, to wait until Annie was at leisure to bath and dress her.



"MY DOLLS."

It was really rather unkind of Jack and Harry to take up the little stranger, whom she had meant to secure as her special property. He was a very dear little boy, too, and though nurse exclaimed with admiration at his height and breadth, Nell was delighted to perceive that he had quite a baby face.

"He'll get tired of the big boys, after a bit," she said to herself, "and they are sure to find him a drag, for he is only a very little young boy—then he'll want to play with me, and he'll like my dolls. We'll have a tea-party with my dolls this evening."

This thought cheered Nell, and she went happily enough into the pleasant day-nursery, where nurse was laying the breakfast things, and she tried not to cast too longing glances at Jack, up whose legs Charlie was endeavouring to climb.

"Now, young gentlemen, come to breakfast," called out nurse's kind voice. "Master Charlie, my pet, I'll just put on this clean pinafore—just come over, dearie, and I'll tie it under your curls."

Charlie hesitated, frowned; but finally his brow cleared, he came up to nurse, raised his blue eyes to her face, and said,—

"All wite—I doesn't mind—you may put him on."

Nurse tied on the pinafore—kissed the little baby face, and said he was a good boy.

"Does you know why I doesn't mind?"

"No, my pet."

"'Cause I p'omised."

"Who dear?"

"Nussing. Neber mind."

Nurse said no more, and they sat down to breakfast.

"Does you eat sugar?" asked Charlie, gazing for the first time attentively and with much interest at Nell.

"Oh! yes," she answered, flushing with pleasure at the honour of being at last addressed by this very interesting stranger.

"I like sugar very much," she continued, speaking fast in her eagerness, "and I eat lots of lumps when I can get them—lots and lots!"

Charlie's face became clouded. He had a very high-pitched bell-like voice, but it now assumed a minor key. "I'm 'fraid you are baby," he said.

The boys roared. Nurse said, "Hush, dears!" for Nell's small face was crimson.

"I are man cause I eats salt, I does," proclaimed the same clear, authoritative little voice; and at this moment mother came into the room.

CHAPTER IV.

"*I P'OMISED NOT TO KY.*"

"'You speak . . . not unwisely,' I said."
"*Autocrat of the Breakfast Table.*"

"Marjory Mutton-pie and Johnny Bo-peep,
They met together in Gracechurch Street."
"*Nursery Rhymes of England.*"



VERY sweet young lady, who had parted only the day before with almost a breaking heart from her little boy, had said to him—

"For six long months you won't see your own mother; then if I get quite well I will come back to you. Though you are only a baby boy in years, you are my own manly little lad."

"I *are* man," interrupted Charlie; "I'll be as tall man as my dadda, I will."

"I want you to try to be good like your father, my darling, and to obey the father and mother of the little children with whom you are going to live. They are very dear little children, and they have got a very dear and loving father and mother, and I know you will be happy. Try to be good and to obey this new father and mother, my little man."

"And have the lickle sildrens got nurse too?" asked Charlie.

"Oh, yes! such a nice nurse."

"And must I p'omise to 'bey her too?"

"It would be a great comfort to mother if you would make that promise, Charlie."

Charlie gazed hard at his fair young mother; then he shut up his eyes tight; then he opened them wide, and, gazing full into his mother's eyes, he said:

"I p'omise."

"Thank you, my son."

"Does you know why I s'ut my eyes?"

"No, dear."

"I was telling God dat I p'omised; and I won't ky, none times, till you come back adain, musser."

A few moments after this conversation the young mother and the little son parted.

It is not only the tearful partings which mean pain; and those two pairs of blue eyes—the mother's and the child's—when they smiled good-bye to each other covered two hearts that ached. The little child said to himself:

"I p'omised not to ky." And being only a baby boy, though a brave one, he soon forgot his pain—but the mother—?

Charlie Ross was by no means a perfect child, and when his own mother said to him—

"You will obey this new father and mother, and this new nurse, until I come back to you again," she had touched at the root of what the little man found most difficult to do—he found it very hard work to obey. From his earliest infancy, the moment he was told to do anything, that thing became disagreeable in his eyes.

At one time he had a nurse whose ways were not very kind, and she tried to coerce the high spirit, and to bully the boy into obedience.

There were stormy scenes, bitter tears, violent fits of passion, but no obedience; the boy would not be driven.

His mother tried a different tack, and could lead her little lad, with gentle words of persuasion, where she willed.

Now that he was parting from her, and parting from his present nice nurse, who was to accompany her mistress abroad, she trembled for him. But there was a great deal in that promise.

Charlie was, however, entering on a thorny path, and for the first time was coming into a world full of temptation.

The boy, who had never before known anything of the daily life of other children, suddenly found himself in a nursery full of spirited little people, most of them older than himself, and all with wills and ways of their own.

Nurse was inclined to be very kind to the little stranger; she pitied him, for she knew why he had come to them; she knew that his own mother was very ill indeed, and might never get better. But though she pitied Charlie, she could not be expected to understand all his little ways; and besides her hands and time were very full with the care of her own four nurslings.

Mrs. Humphrey had never much time to spend in the nursery, but she felt pretty confident that Charlie would be happy, and when she came in rather unexpectedly on that first morning's breakfast, and saw the children all laughing merrily together, she dismissed any fears about the little stranger from her mind.

She now, however, did a very injudicious thing. The nurse who had accompanied Charlie to Hazelbrook, the name of the Humphreys' home, and who was to return to her own mistress that day, had promised her little boy on the night before, that she would come to him and say good-bye, and take any last message he wished to send to his mother.

Mrs. Humphrey had scarcely heard the woman make this promise. Charlie was almost asleep, and she had thought it best to take him up and put him under his future nurse's care directly. When she saw the children quite happy at breakfast, and Charlie's little face so bright and merry, she went down at once to this woman and told her that she thought she had better go, without bidding the little fellow "good-bye!"

"It will only give him pain," said Mrs. Humphrey, "and he seems very happy now."

"But I promised him, ma'am," answered the woman, "and Master Charlie never forgets a promise."

"What time did you make him the promise?" asked Mrs. Humphrey; "was it when he was nearly asleep last night?"

"Yes, ma'am; but he was awake enough to know what I was saying."

"Oh, he could not have been—he cannot remember anything you said to him, when he was so dreadfully sleepy; and if by any chance he does, I will make it up to him. I mean to have a tea-party to-night in the nursery, in honour of his coming. I really would rather you did not see him again, nurse; there is no use in upsetting the poor little fellow."



"Very well, ma'am. But nothing ever makes up to Master Charlie for a broken promise. However, it must be as you please, of course."

"I think it is wisest, nurse. Please give my dear love to Mrs. Ross, and Charlie shall have my tenderest and best care."

Accordingly nurse went away, and Charlie, unconscious of her departure, played happily enough in the pleasant nursery. In the

exciting presence of his new pursuits and new companions, he forgot for a time, not only his nurse, but even his own father and mother. Harry and Jack were delighted with the plucky little fellow. They took him into the garden and showed him their rabbits, their pigeons, a pet squirrel, two small dogs, and some other charming play-fellows.

They also showed him their gardens, and said he should have one for his very own self; and, as the morning happened to be fine, nurse allowed the children to stay out of doors for some time, and as long as Charlie was in the open country air, and gazing with his surprised blue eyes at these country treasures, he was perfectly contented.

But the afternoon proved dull and cloudy. Nurse would not allow her little party to go out again. Jack and Harry had to prepare some very easy lessons for a governess, who came to them for an hour in the afternoons, and Charlie began to feel himself both dull and lonely. It is true that Nell was waiting to lay a beating heart and the whole of a most loyal service at the feet of this little king. But, alas for Nell! nurse pounced upon her, and ordered four inches of sewing to be got through. This was the quiet time, when nurse got baby Dick off for his afternoon nap, and Charlie was desired to sit still with the rest.



CHAPTER V.

A LONELY LITTLE BOY.

"I went up one pair of stairs,
Just like me;
I went up two pair of stairs,
Just like me;
I went into a room,
Just like me."

"Nursery Rhymes of England."



E did not like this. For the first time nurse's voice sounded rather sharp to him. It was a new experience to the only child to have to keep quiet for the sake of another.

"Sit still, Master Charlie," said nurse—"you must not make any noise for the present." Nurse went away, and a frown gathered on the frank little brow, and the blue eyes were clouded. The other children, all busy with their own pursuits, seemed to have forgotten Charlie—he had nothing to do, for his own special toys were not yet unpacked. Nurse had given him a little chair all to himself; he sat down on it now, and tried the effect of tilting it backwards and forwards. Of course both Charlie and chair came down with a crash; baby awoke and began to cry, Harry raised his head from his book to laugh, and Charlie, gathering himself up from the floor, said with a red face and delighted smile: "I are finny—aren't I?"

"You're a very naughty boy," said nurse; "you have got to

stay still; if you make that noise again I must put you in the corner."

"What did 'oo said?" asked Charlie, to whose blissful ignorance corners were unknown.

Harry and Jack made wry faces at him, and Jack endeavoured to describe this condign state of existence by means of pantomime.

Charlie burst into fits of laughter, and nurse saying to herself:

"He must be brought under control, or we'll all be nowhere," got up, and moving his little chair into a distant part of the room, placed him on it, and said:



"Now you're in disgrace."

"I are in disg'ace," repeated Charlie. He began to sway himself gently backwards and forwards, and sang in a monotonous but rather cheerful tone:

"I are in disg'ace—I are in disg'ace."

Nurse went back to her charge—she thought it best to take no notice of a noise too faint to awake Master Dick; but presently Charlie sang out loud and clear:

"I like dis lickle corner vedy well."

Dick again set up a roar, and nurse, now past all patience, took the obstreperous new-comer into the inner nursery.

Charlie might sing or shout as loud as he pleased there, but it was dreary work performing these feats all alone.

He tried making himself very merry for a moment or two, then suddenly plumped down at the foot of his own new cot, and discovered that he was a lonely little boy.

" I don't want dose oder sildrens none times adain," he said to



himself—" dey's not nice; dey's not finny. I want my own nurs'ry, and my own oder nurse, and my own musser."

This hour, which was turning out so sadly for the poor little fellow—this hour when he discovered for the first time in the whole course of his little life, that nobody specially wished for him, was one of the happiest hours of his day at home; for then he was all alone with his mother, and she petted him, and sang to him, or they played delightful games of imagination together, in which they made bread or cooked dinners, or paid calls, all in

pantomime; and each word of Charlie's was treasured, and each little remark applauded. Oh! it was a sad change.

"I'se kite lonely—I are," he repeated sadly, sitting in a disconsolate little heap on the floor; but though he said this, and though his face was dismal, he did not think of crying.

Suddenly a brilliant idea occurred to him. Nurse, his own, own real nurse, was still in the house.



"DIS HANNEL OF 'OOM WON'T OPEN."

"I'll go see her 'dain," he said. He rose instantly to his feet, opened the night nursery door, and popped his little curly head into the room where the Humphrey children were sitting quiet as mice. It so happened that neither nurse nor Annie were in the room at the moment. Charlie walked boldly in, and made for the outer door.

"Hullo, old chap; where are you off to?' asked Jack, in as loud a voice as he dared to use.

"Nesser mind," was the curt reply of the self-absorbed little man.

The outer door was not really shut—he opened it quickly and found himself in the unknown region outside. It was rather cold and dark outside the pleasant nursery, and Charlie gazed up and down in perplexity: no "own nurse" awaited him, and in this big unexplored region he did not know where to find her.

"I sink I'll walk tru every 'oom," he said, and he began a patient pilgrimage.

The house was large and old-fashioned. It was a house made up of many additions—little flights of stairs going up to one room—little flights of stairs going down to another—there were long corridors, and endless passages, and the numbers of rooms to be visited seemed quite interminable, particularly as no "own nurse" was to be seen in any of them.

"Dis hannel of 'oom won't open," he remarked, trying hard at a locked door. He really felt tears very near at last, and in this condition an under-housemaid discovered him.

"Why, are you the new little gentleman?" she exclaimed. "Bless him; ain't he a beauty!" she added, *sotte voce*, as the blue eyes, dewy with those kept-back tears, were raised to her face.

"I'se lookin' for my own nurse 'dain; she's name is Ma'y. I'se sinkin' maybe she's in kitsin."

There was a request in the last words, particularly as the little plump hand was placed confidingly in the under-housemaid's.

Now Jane had no love for Mrs. Nurse. She was a wild girl, full of fun and mischief—and she thought it would be rather a lark to carry off the little gentleman to the lower regions, and put the nursery in no end of a fright.

She caught him up in her arms, said, "We'll go and look in the kitchen, then," and ran gaily down the back stairs.

CHAPTER VI.

"*MILES AWAY.*"

"A rose has thorns as well as honey,
I'll not have her for love or money."
"*Sing-Song.*"

CHARLIE was in high glee now. His volatile spirits went up quickly—he kissed and hugged the under-housemaid, said many times,—

"I like you, I do," and altogether won that young person's heart.

But Jane knew, as well as every other servant in the house, that Charlie's own nurse was miles away by this time, and she was much puzzled how to convey this fact to the child.

She walked boldly into the kitchen, and confronted the cook, still holding her little charge in her arms.

"Bless him; Mrs. Halliday, ain't he a darling! and he's looking for his own nurse, and she's miles and miles away; I do call it a shame."

Mrs. Halliday was very busy getting her dinner forward. She was also making some icing for a cake which was to appear in the nursery, on the occasion of a not very distant birthday. She therefore said,—

"You know you've no call to bring the child here, Jane; and you'll get into a scrape if you're found out, sure as my name's Susan Halliday."

"Come then, dearie," said Jane; and she bore Charlie out of the kitchen, though he was longing with all his heart in his eyes to see that frosting completed.

"We'll look for your own nurse round here," said the under-housemaid, going through the scullery, and advancing towards the laundry beyond.



"I DO CALL IT A SHAME."

She was completely puzzled what to do, and began to repent of her interference.

Just then Jane's own special bell rang loudly. She dared not disobey; she set Charlie down on the ground and said,—

"You stay here, little master, until I come back for you; 'tis a nice room, isn't it?"

"Dis is lobely place," he answered, gazing with appreciative eyes at the whitewashed walls and washing-tubs.

"Well, you stay here till I return to you."

"So I will," he said, shaking his curly head.

Jane ran off, comparatively easy in her mind and devoutly hoping that she would not be kept long.

The laundry was quite deserted, for this was neither washing, nor wringing, nor ironing day.

The tubs were placed tidily in a row; the mangle was silent, and the irons shone from their shelves.

Charlie gazed around him. After all this white and tidy place was not so very beautiful; there was nothing whatever to play with here: the tubs looked forbidding, the mangle was altogether an unapproachable monster, and the irons, the only pretty things he could see, were quite out of his reach.

The laundry was a cold place, too, and he soon grew impatient, and began to wish for Jane's return, or at least that he might find his way back to the kitchen, where cook was employed over some very charming work.

Suddenly standing there, a memory came into the little mind; somebody—he did not know whether it was cook or Jane—had said that "his own nurse was miles away." That could not be a nice place, for the person who spoke those few words had said,—

"It is a shame, but she is miles away." "Where *was* 'miles away'? Was it in the laundry? No, no—there was no 'own nurse' hiding behind the mangle, or even behind the largest washing-tub. 'Miles away' was not here, and neither could it be in the kitchen, or cook would have allowed him to stop there. Where *was* this nasty place, where his own poor nurse was hiding? Could it be in the garden?"

Instantly a smile came to his face. "I sink she's in garding," he said, and then he ran out of the laundry; for Jane had not taken the precaution to fasten the door, and in another moment he was in the open air. He was in the garden, and "miles away" must be close to him; but oh! it was cold, for it was now rather late in the afternoon, and the month was October.

He ran here and there, and very soon lost sight of the house;

but alas! alas! no "miles away" with "own nurse" sitting in its midst could he discover.

"I'se kite tired—I sink I'll *have* to ky," exclaimed the little fellow, standing still and gazing disconsolately round him. "Oh!



what a finny, finny f'ower!" and then he dashed across the grass to examine with interest a late "Gloire de Dijon."

"'Tis a wose," he said. "I know dat f'ower vedy well—musser has dose f'owers sometimes—I sink I'll pick him for her."

He could not reach, however, to the top blossoms, and a bud which grew lower down had a thorn which pierced the poor little hand. This was just the drop too much.

"Oh! I sink I must ky—I aren't man—I are baby—oh! I know bleed will come," gazing at his torn little finger. "I want musser. I want mine own nurse. Where *is* miles away?"



CHAPTER VII.

THE BIRDIES IN THE WOOD.

"Old woman, old woman, old woman, quoth I,
O whither, O whither, O whither, so high?
To brush the cobwebs off the sky!
Shall I go with thee? Aye, by-and-by."

"Nursery Rhymes of England."



THE sun had set by this time, and the garden looked really very dark and dreary. As the poor little man wandered disconsolately along he found his baby heart sinking lower and lower. He had now reached the shrubbery, which was quite gloomy enough to frighten a less brave child.

Charlie, however, was too intent on his search to have any room for fear; he plunged boldly into the deep shadows made by the trees, and now began to call aloud—

"Nurse! nursey! Ma'y! Mine own nursey—where are 'ou?"

Of course no one answered; the birds going to sleep up in their branches amongst the trees might have been disturbed by the little cry, but if they were, they made no sign.

Charlie got quite into the centre of the shrubbery, and then he stood still to discover two things: first, that call as loud as he might, there was no "own nurse" to answer him; second, that he was very tired and sleepy.

"I'se sink I'll lie down—it's kite night, and I'se s'eepy. I couldn't find miles away, till smorning. I'se 'spect nursey's s'eepin'

in that finny place now. I'll s'eep too, till smornin—'cause I are tired, I are."

He lay down there and then, on some dry autumn leaves, and was about to shut his eyes when he suddenly started upright.



"Why, I'se nesser said my p'ayers," he exclaimed; "how finny! what would musser say?"

He folded his hands and closed his eyes, and repeated something very low, with his golden and curly head bent.

Not a whisper could the birds hear of the little prayer, but they

might have caught an echo of the hymn which followed. For Charlie in his own nursery at home always said his prayers in a whisper, but his hymn out loud.

Now standing upright, with his eyes open, and his voice sounding quite cheerful, he went through the familiar words—

"'*Zentle Desus, meek—mild,*
Look upon a lickle sild,
Pity my simplic-tee,
Suffer me to come—Dee.

'*Fain would I to Dee, b'ought,*
Dearest Lord, forbid 't not,
In de kingdom of Dy gace,
Gant a lickle sild—place.'

"I'se wonderin' if zentle Desus sees me going to s'eep in this finny place," he said, in conclusion. And then he lay down and folded his arms across his chest, and went off into the land of dreams, as confidently sure, that he was in the great Father's care as were all the other birdies in the wood.



CHAPTER VIII.

"OH, DEAR!" EXCLAIMED MOTHER.

"Over the water, and over the lea,
And over the water to Charlie,
I'll have none of your nasty beef,
Nor I'll have none of your barley;
But I'll have some of your very best flour,
To make a white cake for my Charlie."

"Nursery Rhymes of England."



HAT was a very dull hour for Nell, when she sat and sewed. She was not at all, at present, a proficient in the art of needlework; she had only come to the stage when the finger is severely pricked, and the needle, in the vain efforts to tug it through the offending calico, is bent, unthreaded, or broken.

Oh! the hopeless efforts to find that needle's eye, oh! the vain endeavours to put right again the bent or blunted little instrument! Nell and her needle had a fight nearly every day—and nearly every day the needle was victorious.

On this first afternoon of Charlie's visit, she found her task more distasteful than usual. She had been highly entertained by his antics in the corner, and had felt the keenest sympathy for him when she had seen his little broad fat back disappearing into the night nursery.

"Nurse was unkind," so thought Nell; "for of course Charlie could not know this horrid rule of keeping silence for a whole hour. And nurse had given him no toys."

Nell felt that rather than see him sitting so disconsolate, she would have trusted him with her own beloved Anna-Maria Jones even though mother had forgotten to mend the leg through which the bran "bleeded."

Nurse, however, had not entered into the mind of Charlie as thoroughly as Nell would have done; and the consequence was he was now in punishment in the night nursery.

Nurse presently went out of the room, and a few moments after the curly head of the little stranger boy popped round the door.

How Nell's heart beat! She thought his eyes would be red with weeping—that he would be altogether quite in dreadful trouble. Not at all; his blue eyes were too bright to have shed any tears; his little rosebud mouth looked resolved, but by no means troubled. He walked across the room with an air of determination and dignity, said, "Nesser mind," when questioned as to his movements, and disappeared into the regions beyond.

Nell dared not run after him; she would have been severely punished had she spoken or moved during this silent hour; and oh! what would Charlie do, all by himself in their great big house?

Presently nurse came back, she took baby Dick, who was now broad awake, out of his cot, she drew up the nursery blinds, she poked the fire—how delicious the noise was to Nell!—and then she spoke,—

"Young gentlemen, put by your slates, please. Miss Nell, you need not mind any more needlework to-day. Now I must fetch that poor little master in the other room. He's a dear wee lamb, but he must learn a bit of discipline like the rest of you. You know, children, that you are going to have a treat this evening; there's a seed cake coming up for tea, and mother has sent word that there's to be a cup and saucer and plate and knife laid for her. It is all in honour of Master Charlie. Now, boys, do keep steady."

Jack and Harry had sprung at each other, and were engaged in a fierce though playful wrestling match, in which the words—

"Hooray! Jolly! Jolly! Three cheers for Charlie!" might have been distinguished.

Nell, however, ran to the night nursery; she threw open the door and then called nurse.

"He's not here, nurse; he's gone away; minutes and minutes ago, he walked right through our nursery, and I know he's got losted! Oh! I know he's got losted."

"Dear me! Miss Nell, why didn't you run after and stop him?" asked nurse, thoroughly vexed, and at once making a very unfair and inconsistent speech. The boys scrambled to their feet and came forward.

"I asked him where he was going," said Harry, "and he would not tell me, cheeky little chap! But oh, dear! don't make a fuss; he's safe enough. Nell, you're not going to cry, surely."

"He's all right," put in Jack. "Harry, come along; let's try that new ball. We are going to have mother and seed cake to-night—ain't it jolly?"

Nurse went over and rang the bell sharply. "I can't leave Master Dick. Oh, dear! what worries the best of children are, to be sure! Annie!" as that young person came at her summons, "you run and look in every hole and corner in the house for Master Charlie. I left him in the night nursery, and he's run out without leave, and there's no saying what a sight o' mischief he may be in by this time. No, Miss Nell, you stay where you are."

When Annie, however, came back with the information that nowhere could she get sight or tidings of the little truant, nurse became so alarmed that she really lost her temper—a thing which very seldom happened with her.

"Here, Annie, take the baby; see and don't drop him, and keep your wits about you. Children, you're all to stay in this room till I come back. Master Harry and Master Jack, if you attempt to tease the baby, you shall be put into the corner for half-an-hour each."

Then shaking her finger warningly at all four, who really, with the exception of Dick, began to consider themselves culprits without knowing why, she set off herself to search for Charlie.

But nurse, diligently as she did look, carefully as she peeped under every bed, and poked her nose into every cupboard, though

she went from one room to another, and even mounted the stairs to the disused attics, though she called first loudly, and then gently, could neither find the missing child, nor learn any tidings of him. For cook happened to be out when she went to the kitchen, and Jane when she heard the fuss going on hid herself in abject terror in the barn. Nurse came back with her rosy pleasant face quite white with alarm.

"My heart's in my mouth, Annie, and no mistake," she said to the nursery maid; "why, that blessed darling lamb may have run out, and how do I know that those gipsies, that have settled on the common, may not have picked him up?"

It was on this scene that mother, smiling and pleasant, and looking forward to a very happy evening with her children, entered.

"Miss Nell can tell you all about it, ma'am," said nurse at the conclusion of her tale, "for she saw the child walk through the room, and I must say——"

"Nell isn't here now," eagerly interrupted Jack and Harry. "She went out a good long time back; she would go, though we told her she was dreadfully naughty; but she said, 'she didnt't care a bit.'"

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed mother.



CHAPTER IX.

"DOING A DISOBEY."

"And all the day they hunted,
And nothing could they find
But a ship a-sailing,
A-sailing with the wind.
And all the night they hunted,
And nothing could they find
But the moon a-gliding,
A-gliding with the wind."

"Nursery Rhymes of England."



ELL as a rule was a gentle and submissive child. She had not the high spirits of her brothers, and never was known to get into scrapes except when led on by them.

She was rather a favourite with nurse, who held her up as a pattern child, and Nell was proud of the distinction. But now when nurse left the nursery intent on her search for Charlie, and desired the children not to leave the room until her return, Nell there and then made up her mind to disobey her. She stood in the middle of the floor with her little heart swelling from a keen sense of injustice and agony.

Nurse had spoken sharp words to her for being obedient. Oh! how she had *longed* to fly after that dear little baby boy, and bring him back from she knew not what danger. She had to press her feet quite firmly upon the floor, and screw her little lips together, and jamb herself on to her seat. She had done this, because she

would obey nurse, and now she was scolded for obeying her, and in some way was held responsible for Charlie's danger.

She looked round the room. Annie, with quite a cheerful and unconcerned face, was playing with Dick. Dick was saying, "Nan, Nan," and crowing and kicking in her arms. Jack and Harry, in a distant corner, were having a furious game of battledore and shuttlecock; no one was giving Charlie a thought except Nell. It was too much—she could stand it no longer. She rushed



"SWINGING IT ON HER ARM, MARCHED BOLDLY PAST HER LITTLE BROTHERS."

into the night nursery, pulled open a drawer, took out the first hat she could find, which happened to be a Sunday one, and swinging it on her arm, marched boldly past her little brothers.

"Oh! Nell, where *are* you off to?"

"I am going out," said Nell.

"You are naughty! Nurse said we weren't none of us to stir from here."

"I don't care," said Nell. And then she slammed the door after

her, and rushed down the back stair-case, feeling more angry and defiant than she had ever done in her life before.

She was certainly disobedient now; but she didn't care, and she would tell nurse she didn't care.

She was going to find Charlie her own self; and she would be indifferent to nurse's worst punishment, if only she succeeded.

When the children were very, very hopelessly naughty, nurse took off their clothes and put them to bed for some hours.

This was considered a great disgrace, and Nell had never yet undergone so severe a punishment; but she made up her mind to it to-day. There would be seed-cake and mother in the nursery, but Nell would be in bed. Well, she did not care if only she could find Charlie.

Having got down the backstairs without any interruption, she ran across the wide servants' hall, into a passage beyond, and from thence into the back yard. There she came plump up against Jane, who, with her apron over her head, was returning from her cowardly shelter in the barn.

"Oh, law! Miss Nell, where are you off to now?"

"I am looking for Charlie; he's got losted, you know," said Nell, raising her great serious brown eyes, and fixing them on the under-housemaid's face.

"There *is* a fuss," answered Jane; "but look here, Miss Nell, I know a thing, and I'll tell it to you. I met the little gentleman more than a hour back, all away by himself near the best bedrooms, and he said he was looking for his own nurse, and he coaxed me that pretty that I took him down with me to the kitchen. I shouldn't have done it, of course, but I jest did, and there's an end of it; and I left him for a minute or two in the laundry, and when I come back there wasn't a sight of him to be seen anywhere."

"He's got losted," repeated Nell, clasping her hands; "I know he's got losted!"

"And what are you doing here, in the back yard, Miss? You 'as no call to be here, and what 'ell nurse say?"

"I don't care," said Nell; "I am doing a disobey, Jane, and I'm naughty, and I don't care a bit."

"Oh, law! Miss; why you has a spirit," said the admiring Jane; "but you'll catch it, and with your best Sunday hat with its white feather a-strealing there in the mud. Put it on your head, Miss, do. I suppose you are after looking for Master Charlie, and as I'm naughty too, why I'll just go with you, and help you to find him."

"Thank you, Jane," answered Nell. She put on her hat and allowed Jane to tie it under her chin, and then she walked along gravely by the housemaid's side.

"Let's look where the little chickens are," she said, "and where the wee piggies live. He did like the little piggies this morning; he jumped up and down ever so often when he saw them."

"I don't think he's there, then, Miss," replied the wiser Jane, "for if he ran out by the laundry, he'd get into the open garden at once; not but what I have looked," she added, "and not a sight of him could I see. I am mortal frightened, Miss Nell, as he's took by the gipsies, for they've settled down on the common, and always one or other of them is prowling round; that's my fear, Miss, and I don't deny it."

"It was very naughty of you to leave him in the laundry all by hisself," responded Nell. "I s'pose you're feeling dreadful ashamed, same as I am 'bout my disobey, and that's why you've got those nasty thoughts 'bout the gipsies. I am not 'fraid about the gipsies, 'cause mother says God takes care of us little children. I think, Jane, we'll look under every rose bush, and down by where the trees are planted, and maybe we'll soon come to poor little losted Charlie."

"Very well, Miss," said Jane, in quite a submissive voice, for Nell had managed to rebuke her in a way that she felt. They tripped round and round the beds, and peeped under the rose bushes, and under the thick lauristinus trees.

Nell headed the search, and Jane followed her, sighing and groaning, and wishing with all her heart that she had never interfered in Mrs. Nurse's province. At last they came to the borders of the shrubbery.

"What's this!" exclaimed Nell, picking up a battered and bent picture card, which represented a rosy-faced impossible child, standing by an equally impossible lamb. "He's here! he's here!" she added; "I gave him this darling little boy and lamb my own self this morning; he's losted in the shrubbery, and we'll find him d'rectly—come 'long, Jane."

Nell was quite mistress of the situation now; her depressed spirits rose high; she rushed down the shrubbery path holding the card which had given her the clue, and shouting gaily, "Charlie! *Cha—arlie!* Char—*lie!*"

"All wite," sounded presently in a clear note, from what seemed a great distance; but it guided Nell and Jane, who in another moment came upon the little truant, sitting up with flushed cheeks on his bed of leaves.

"Is it mornin'?" he said; "I'se had such a finny, finny s'eep."



CHAPTER X.

"NOW THERE WAS A GREAT FUSS MADE."

"Hey, my kitten, my kitten,
And hey, my kitten, my deary!
Such a sweet pet as this
Was neither far nor neary."

"Nursery Rhymes of England."



HEN mother sat down in the nursery and said—

"Oh, dear!" she was as perplexed and troubled a woman, as could be found in so pleasant a room.

For a few moments she was in such a state of bewilderment that her usual promptitude and decision failed her.

She had come upon the nursery in a grand crisis of its existence—Charlie had disappeared, Nell had disappeared, nurse's strong sensible face was quite pale with anxiety—Annie so far lost control of herself in the universal confusion, that she allowed that precious baby Dick to kick and scream unheeded in his cot; and the two elder boys forgot even seed cake in their astonishment at all this fuss, and at mother's hopeless attitude.

Then to make things worse, cook came hurrying from the kitchen, with her arms all over flour, and her large white linen apron on, to relate how Jane had appeared in the kitchen more than an hour back, with Charlie in her arms, and how Charlie was fretting for his own nurse.

Annie, accompanied by Jack, who took the opportunity of also

becoming disobedient, hurried off in full chase of Jane. Neither could Jane be found.

The situation was becoming really fearful. Harry opened his mouth wide and almost forgot to breathe; Jack stole in behind Annie, and no one took the slightest notice of him, and then cook dropped some further dark hints about the gipsies, which put the culminating touch to poor mother's agonies.

"Oh, dear!" she said, "and I am sitting here doing nothing. Oh! my little Nell, my little darling, and that sweet little boy who was given to us to take care of. Oh, dear! nurse, what shall we do? Cook, you have quite terrified me about the gipsies."

"Now, ma'am, don't take on," answered both women. "I'll just send James the stable boy into town as quick as possible for master," said cook. "And we had better begin to search all over the grounds," added nurse. Mother said, "I will go and look myself. Oh! my poor, poor little children."

Then she rose and went towards the door, followed by the boys, who were really frightened now, and who clung to her skirts.

But just then, just at that critical, supreme moment, there was a noise heard below—a joyful, delicious, delightful noise, the eager sound of quick little feet, the medley of high-pitched little voices.

They came nearer. Jack knew them instantly; he said under his breath, all his anxieties instantly relieved,—

"What a fuss! 'tis the children"; and he looked longingly towards the seed cake which cook had brought in, and had placed on a distant table. The little steps came up the back stairs, and along the passage, and the next moment Nell and Charlie both rushed in, poor Nell's face very red, and her best Sunday hat hopelessly destroyed.

Holding Charlie's hand, she ran up to mother and buried her little ashamed face against mother's dress. "I have done a great big disobey; but I found him my own self, I found him my own self, and I'll go to bed at once, and I don't want no seed cake."

But to her great surprise, instead of any angry words being said to her, or any punishment inflicted, Nell found herself lifted up into mother's arms, and kissed, and hugged, and blessed; and mother

said she could ask no questions now, she had got such a dreadful fright, and she was so very thankful.

Mother even forgot Charlie in her great joy at having her only little girl in her arms.

Charlie, however, was by no means discomposed. His hair was in a dreadful tangle, and his eyes were very bright, but his appetite was keen after his run and sleep in the fresh air; he looked round the room for signs of a meal, and his blue eyes sparkled at the sight of the seed cake.

"'Tis smornin' now, and I want my becfas, and dat's lobely cake," he said, running up to it, and peering over the top of the table.

"Oh! *what* a funny little chap!" said Harry. "I say, Charlie, you gave us all a great fright, you know—what did you do it for?"

"Nesser mind," answered the small truant.

But Mrs. Humphrey's attention was now directed to him; she put down Nell, who had felt herself in Paradise, and came over to the table and took the two little cold hands in hers.

"My poor little man, where have you been? Nurse, he is dreadfully cold; he ought to have a warm bath directly. Tell me where you have been, my darling; why did you run away from us all?"

Charlie did not say, "Nesser mind," this time; the way mother had whispered, "My darling!" reminded him of his own mother.

He looked up into Mrs. Humphrey's face, and his sweet eyes became clouded.

"I'se sink, I'se lonely," he said, "and I wanted mine musser, and my own nursey."

"And you ran out to look for them, Charlie."

"Yes, I went ite walk, I went a lot long ways, and I couldn't find no finny place, nor my own nursey; and den I went s'eep, and 'twas mornin'. I want musser, I do, and I want my own nursey, I do."

Poor Mrs. Humphrey! there was something in the piteous little cry, which came without tears or lamentations, which quite touched her heart.

She felt self-reproachful at sending the little boy's own nurse

away so soon, and wondered had she really acted most wisely by so doing.

Jane, too, who now confessed her silly behaviour, related how the child was really found, and Mrs. Humphrey and nurse were both frightened, and feared that Charlie must have caught a terrible cold sleeping out in the open air. So now there was a great fuss made, and a fire was lit in the inner nursery, and a hot



"NELL WAS PERMITTED TO SERVE HIM WITH SEED CAKE AND MILK-AND-WATER."

bath was got, and Charlie was popped into it. The little bed in the new cot was also warmed, until Nell exclaimed that it smelt quite toasty; and then Charlie was put into bed, and allowed to sit up, with his crimson flannel dressing-gown on; and Nell was permitted to serve him with seed cake and milk-and-water her own self.

"I like you, Nell, I do," was his final response, as he settled down to sleep, to all her polite and assiduous attentions.

CHAPTER XI.

"HE FIGHTS THE QUEEN'S BATTLES."

"John Ball shot them all;
John Scott made the shot,
But John Ball shot them all."

"Nursery Rhymes of England."

"  O dat lickle sing first, Nell." The speaker was Charlie, who was standing, his head well thrown back, and one foot slightly forward, superintending the operations of a most devoted little follower.

Nell was on her knees, arranging a play garden in one corner of the nursey.

It was a wet afternoon, and the rain pitter-pattered down the lattice panes of glass. But it was very snug in the nursery ; a bright fire burned in the grate, and nurse sat by it playing with Dick.

The two elder boys were at their lessons in the schoolroom, so Nell and Charlie had the distant corner all to themselves.

They were making a delightful garden with little stiff painted trees cut out of wood, and wooden terraces, painted gaudily, and flower beds with what Nell called quite sweet little wooden flowers.

Charlie was assuming full directions, and giving commands in a lordly style.

"You must put one of dose f'owers dere. What colour's dat, Nell?"

"Yellow, Charlie. I don't think yellow looks pretty near red."

"Oh! but I like it, I do; put the wed and leller dere."

"Very well," answered the submissive Nell; "only I don't think I *can* tell a fairy story about a garden like that."

"Yes, do dell me."

Here Charlie lay down flat on the floor, leaning his chin on his



"THEY WERE MAKING A DELIGHTFUL GARDEN."

hands. "Dell me about fa'ies. Why Nell, dat's a g'een t'ee—I like g'een, I do."

At this interesting stage in the proceedings nurse's voice was heard.

"Miss Nell, do you know that it is past four o'clock?"

"Oh! nursey, I didn't think, and we are making such a lovely garden."

"Yes, we are making it kite boofully," said Charlie; "and dere'll be a hice for de dollies in dis lickle garding."

"Very nice," answered nurse; "but still you must get your hairs brushed and your hands washed, for the Captain may come at any minute, and I know he's safe to run up at once to the nursery."

"Oh! let's go and get washed very quick," said Nell, her face brightening, and her eyes sparkling. I forgot about Uncle Dick; he is so jolly. Come, Charlie!"

"He's so zolly," echoed Charlie, taking Nell's hand and trotting with her into the night nursery. Annie washed their faces and hands, and brushed out their curling hair—Nell's so brown and dark, Charlie's with a glow as if a sunbeam had been caught in it.

Then the two little children ran back eagerly hand in hand, to a favourite perch in one of the deep window seats, the boy saying, as he often did now, to the girl, "I like you, Nell, I do."

They pressed their faces against the window-panes, and Nell gave Charlie full directions as to the exact spot from where they might first hope to see Uncle Dick.

"All wite," he answered, when she had given him exact particulars about ten times, "I'se lookin'; you needn't dell me dat 'dain."

"Uncle Dick is so nice," said Nell; "he's mother's brother, you know; or perhaps you don't know, Charlie, for you are so very young. Nurse says you are only a big baby boy, and you couldn't be expected to understand about Uncle Dick being mother's brother."

"I do underland," retorted Charlie, his little face growing very red. "Mine own musser says I are man; I won't let she say I are baby; I aren't."

"Don't be vexed," said Nell. "*I* think you are very manly and I like you for not being old, for you're nice for me to talk to. Now shall I tell you more about Uncle Dick?"

"Yes, dell me."

"He comes here once or twice a year; we never know quite when he's coming, for he's a soldier, and he fights the Queen's

battles, and course he can't run away if the Queen gives him a lot of fighting to do."

"What's fightin'?" interrupted Charlie.

"Oh! Charlie; don't you know *anything?* Why Uncle Dick is an officer, and he kills the Queen's enemies."

"Uncle Dick's an offer," repeated Charlie, "and he's kilt lots men—I know." He shook his head in a satisfied manner, and continued to gaze out of the window.

"Yes, Charlie, that's it; he's very brave, and he likes us little children to be brave. He is jolly, and whenever he comes he brings a plan with him."

"What's dat, Nell?"

"Oh! I can't put it into words. Last time he gave us a holiday; time before he made up a fairyland in the garden. 'Tis always a 'licious jolly plan."

"Zolly plan," echoed Charlie. "Oh, Nell! I'se sink him's comin'! I'se sink him's comin' up walk vedy quick; dere him is; dat man what's kilt lots of oder men. Look, Nell, look!"

"'Tis him!" exclaimed Nell. "Oh! nurse, nurse, there's my uncle Dick, and he's got out of the carriage, even though it's raining, and he is walking up the avenue."

"Dat's him," echoed Charlie; "him's kilt lots, hasn't him, Nell?"

CHAPTER XII.

UNCLE DICK.

"Little boy, pretty boy, where was you born?"
"Nursery Rhymes of England."

NURSE was quite right in her surmise that Uncle Dick would not be long before he visited the nursery.

On his opening the door and coming in, accompanied by mother, he was immediately surrounded by four eager and excited little people.

Charlie pressed forward with the rest, and gazed up into the tall soldier's face with an enquiring expression.

"He's kilt lots," he said to himself in a satisfied voice.

"Why who's this little man, Eleanor?" said Uncle Dick, instantly catching sight of his fair face and golden head amongst the darker faces and hair of his sister's children.

"Oh, he's little Charlie Ross. You remember his mother, Dick; she is very ill, I am sorry to say, and has been ordered to Algiers for the winter. Charlie can never stand a hot climate, so his father and mother have given him into our care, and we all like to have him, don't we, Nell?

Nell smiled, and Uncle Dick, stooping down, lifted the little fellow on to his broad square shoulder. Jack and Harry looked up with the faintest tinge of envy, for this was a coveted and delightful perch, but to the surprise of every one, Charlie's face

grew suddenly very red, and he said in a quick little passionate voice:

"Put me down, p'ease." He also began to struggle furiously, and Uncle Dick, in consternation, and wondering if the boy was afraid, let him slide to the floor.

"How rude you are! what did you do that for?" enquired Harry, for Jack was already taking possession of the despised shoulder.

"Nesser mind," was the reply, accompanied by an angry little shake.

"Didn't you like it, Charlie?" whispered Nell, in a tender voice.

"Nesser mind," he said again, standing a little back from the group, his face still flushed, and his eyes bright with the tears he was with difficulty keeping back.

"Don't bother the little chap, children," said Uncle Dick, and then he began to stride in soldierly fashion up and down the room, Jack still on his shoulder, and the others, including Charlie—who had quickly forgotten whatever had caused his temporary annoyance—following with deep admiration.

Uncle Dick was very tall—quite six feet high; he had a square figure and that upright carriage which the Queen's brave soldiers generally possess.

He had a very frank and pleasant face, the lower part of it, it is true, a good deal tanned by the sun, but his forehead was white, and his short brown hair very crisp and curling. He had merry blue eyes too, and a way about him altogether which captivated the hearts of most children.

Whenever he came to pay a visit at Hazlebrook he seemed to bring sunshine with him. The servants became obliging, the children good, and the father and mother quite delightful.

He did not stay very long in the nursery on this occasion, but before he went away he said a few words which caused considerable excitement.

"You all know that to-morrow will be Sunday. Stay, how many of them go to church, Eleanor?"

"Oh! Jack and Harry—and Nell did before Charlie came; now she likes to stay at home with him."

"Very well, to-morrow after church, that is about one o'clock, I shall come up to the nursery. You little fellows, and Nell too, can all look out for me, for I shall be sure to be punctual."

"That's cause he's a soldier," whispered Nell to Charlie.

"Quite right, Nell; I shall be true to my word, and when I come up I have something to say, which I am afraid will disappoint you, but I have also a plan to propose, which I expect will give you a great deal of interest and pleasure. Now good-night, everyone, and good-bye for the present."



CHAPTER XIII.

ALL ABOUT THE PEOPLE WHO WENT TO CHURCH AND THE PEOPLE WHO WATCHED THEM GO.

"What are little boys made of, made of,
What are little boys made of?
Snaps and snails, and puppy-dogs' tails;
And that's what little boys are made of.
What are little girls made of, made of, made of,
What are little girls made of?
Sugar and spice, and all that's nice;
And that's what little girls are made of."

"Nursery Rhymes of England."

THE children had a great deal to talk about that night; and their interest in Uncle Dick's promised visit, and their wonder as to the nature of the plan which he was about to propose, were so great that they forgot to question Charlie as to his extraordinary behaviour when Uncle Dick mounted him on his shoulder.

Even Nell forgot to say anything about it, and as to the elder boys, their little heads were quite full of all sorts of imaginary delights. "It's nice, the way Uncle Dick comes, just when the weather is getting dull for us," said Jack the next morning; "he likes us big boys to be with him a good bit, doesn't he, Harry?"

"I 'spect we amuse him," said Harry, "he's a soldier, you know, and it must be rather dreary for him to be shut up all day with father and mother; and then in the week-days, father's away most

of the time, and he has only mother to speak to. Poor Uncle Dick, it must be dull for him!"

"It isn't a bit," interrupted loyal little Nell; "it's never dull for nobody to be with mother; I don't think you're kind to say that, Harry."

"Come, come, young gentlemen, it's time to get ready for church," interrupted nurse.

The two boys were hurried off by Annie into the night nursery, where sundry sounds of washing and brushing might have been heard, interrupted by groans and ejaculations from the victims.

"I say, Annie, you have let soap into my eye. Oh! Oh!"

"I won't have my hair brushed the wrong way, I won't, I won't," etc., etc.

"We'll climb up on the window-sill and watch them all walking down the avenue," said Nell to Charlie. "I am so glad," she continued, as she and her little companion settled themselves comfortably in the deep-cushioned seat, "I am so glad I haven't to go to church this morning. My heart is going pit-a-pat, and I couldn't keep still. Does your heart ever go pit-a-pat, Charlie?"

"What's dat?" enquired Charlie.

"Oh! dear, don't you know?—why bump, bump, and sometimes a little bang, and you feel so fidgetty all over. I don't like my heart to go pit-a-pat; but I like the reasons why it does. Do you understand me, Charlie?"

"Yes, I underland," said Charlie. "Oh, Nell! dere dey goes, all of 'em off to church; I sink I'd like to go to church, too."

"Uncle Dick first," began Nell, pressing eagerly forward, and beginning to count the procession. "Uncle Dick, very tall in his best Sunday hat, and Harry with him. Uncle Dick is holding mother's prayer book; he is always *very* polite; that's 'cause he's a soldier. Then mother; mother's got her darling new little bonnet on—I am going to have one just the same when I'm a big tall lady, and she has the parasol with the little goldy flowers worked on it, that came from India, and oh! dear, I think that's a new dress, but I'm not quite certain, positive sure. Mother always dresses beautifully."

"Yes, kite boofully," repeated Charlie.

"Then there's father," continued Nell; "he looks rather short, father does, beside Uncle Dick; and I don't think I like those trousers, with the little cross bars all over them. Nurse says they keep clean, a good bit, but I think I like Uncle Dick's pattern better. Father is holding Jack's hand, and Jack is jumping; he'll get his boots in a mess, I'm afraid. Yes, there they go, and oh! here come the servants. Nurse! nurse! cook has got a new shawl on, and oh! *do* look at Jane's hat; why it's all cocky up on one side, and crookedy down on the other, and I do believe she's frizzed her hair up! I like frizzed hair; I wish mother would let mine be cut on my forehead and frizzed up in dear little corkscrew curls."

"Don't make so much noise, children," came here from nurse; "twice I have got that blessed baby off to sleep, and twice you've woke him with your chatter. There, I'll take him into the night nursery, and you can have this room all to yourselves, only you must promise me, Miss Nell, not to get into any mischief."

"Now I call this 'licious," said Nell, sliding down on to the seat, and ensconcing herself luxuriously in a corner; "what shall I do to amuse you, Charlie?"

"Nussing" answered Charlie, in a slightly indignant tone; "I've tellt you lots, that I aren't baby; I are man, and I are going to be an offer when I g'ow up."

"Same as Uncle Dick," said Nell, nodding her head approvingly. "Oh! Charlie," as a sudden memory of yesterday came swiftly back to her, "why didn't you like to ride on Uncle Dick's shoulder? It was so funny the way you wriggled down, and your face was as red as a turkey-cock. I was dreadful feared you was 'fraid."

"I aren't 'fraid of nussing," said Charlie; but his face again assumed the tints of the bird Nell had mentioned, and he kicked his feet up and down, and pushed Nell's small white hand away.

"Why there, you're red all over again; it must be a great big secret, and I love secrets; do tell me, Charlie."

"I aren't wed, and I sink I hate you," was the unexpected

response; and then, all of a sudden, down went the fat little face on the plump hands, and Charlie began to sob.

"Oh, I am sorry, dear Charlie, darling Charlie!" said his repentant companion, putting her arms about him, and trying to comfort him. "I didn't know you'd cry about it; but I won't ask you any more, indeed I won't."



"I WOULDN'T MIND TELLING *YOU*, NELL."

"I wouldn't mind telling *you*, Nell," he said, when he had allowed himself to be petted a little, and had dried away his tears. This latter operation he accomplished by rolling his handkerchief into a ball and digging it fiercely into each blue eye. "I wouldn't mind telling you, only you couldn't underland."

"Oh! Charlie, why not?"

"Cause 'ou don't lobe your fader."

Poor Nell! she quite gasped at this accusation.

"Indeed, Charlie, I think you are very nasty; *why* do you say such dreadful untrue things?"

"'Cause you said, 'oder man was taller nor your dadda, and you said, you liked him's t'ousers best. I don't sink no one taller nor my dadda, and no oder man could have nicer t'ousers; and I p'omised I wouldn't wide on no one's s'oulder, till my own dadda come home."

"Oh! dear, Charlie, I'm so very sorry I teased you. I never could guess that was the reason; I won't tell nobody, and I am glad you told me. But, Charlie, you mustn't say I don't love father; I do dearly. Only, you see, Uncle Dick can't help being taller; God made him taller."

"All wite; God didn't make no one taller nor my dadda, and He didn't let no one have nicer t'ousers."

"Did you promise your father that you wouldn't never ride on anybody else's shoulder?" proceeded Nell. "It seems a pity, for it is so nice riding on shoulders, and your father may be away for lots and lots of months."

"I didn't p'omise him," was the laconic response.

"Oh! dear, Charlie, you said you did."

"I p'omised mine own self; I didn't p'omise nobody but mine own self. Now don't ask me 'bout dat 'dain."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PLAN AND THE REWARDS.

" You shall have an apple,
You shall have a plum,
You shall have a rattle-basket,
When your dad comes home."

"Nursery Rhymes of England."

THE afternoon turned out wet ; but though the rain pitter-pattered on the panes of glass, and the sky looked so leaden and so dreary, there was plenty of sunshine inside the nursery.

Uncle Dick, true to his word, had arrived there, and the four children were gathered round him, and nurse in the background kept her ears open, for she said to herself—

"He's as pleasant-spoken a gentleman as ever walked, and that sensible, too. It's a providence his coming just now, when the weather's that dull and broke up, and baby's sure to be taken bad with his teeth ; for he'll set the children after something as'll occupy them, and keep them out of mischief." Alas for poor nurse! little she knew.

" How long are you likely to stay, Uncle Dick?" here might have been heard Harry's voice.

" Why, my dear boy, you are asking me quite an alarming question. I dread to answer you, Harry, for I fear I shall cast a gloom on all your bright little faces. However, needs must ; I am off to-morrow morning, my boy."

"Oh!" came in deep groans from Harry and Jack, while Nell, laying her little hand on Uncle Dick's knee, enquired in a pathetic voice—

"Is it 'cause the Queen wants you to fight another big, big battle for her that you have got to go away?"

"And to kill lots men?" interrupted Charlie.

"No, Nell, I am not going to fight any battle just now, nor to kill any man, Charlie; but, all the same, I have got to be back at my post to-morrow evening."

"Why has 'ou dot to do dat?" asked Charlie.

"All soldiers have to stick to their posts, my little man. Mine is at a big town called Aldershot, just now. The Queen gave me leave to stay away for two days, but on the third day I must be back again. By-and-bye I shall have a much longer leave, and it is about that pleasant time I want now to talk to you."

"Will dat vedy boo'ful time come soon?" again enquired Charlie.

But here Jack gave him rather a sharp little pat on the shoulder.

"You mustn't interrupt, you know," he said; "Uncle Dick has explained all about posts and such things to us big boys long ago, and it is tiresome for him to have to go through it again; isn't it, Uncle Dick?"

But the only answer Uncle Dick gave was a very quick twinkle out of his merry blue eyes; and somehow it had the effect of making Jack's face red, and causing him to look down.

"I think it is all quite dreadful," said Nell, when the silence began to grow oppressive; "'tis as bad as the rain coming. Charlie and me was so happy this morning, and there was a sun. Now it does pour so, and there's no sun."

"Him's kite dead," said Charlie.

"Not at all, Nell, not at all, Charlie; he's only gone behind the clouds for a bit; he'll come out again, and look all the better for his nice rest. Nell, why are you always so glad to have me in the house?"

"Oh! 'cause I love you a great lot," said Nell.

Here Jack and Harry glanced at one another, smiled, and then Harry said—

"Nell's reason is just like a girl; 'tis because you are so brave, Uncle Dick, and so, so tall."

"Him's not taller nor my dadda," interrupted Charlie, fiercely.

"Well, well, we will say that you all love me; there is no reason so good as Nell's after all; but if you like we will add that the reason you love me is because I am brave—I hope I am—though I have had cowardly moments too, like all other people—boys and girls and little children included. Now, I want to love you all, for the same reason that you love me. I want you three little chaps, and you, Nell, to learn to be brave. You must ask mother what it means, for I never preach, not even nursery sermons; but my little plan is this: I leave four little children in this nursery—I don't count Dick—I leave four little children, who can act and think and talk; they can be soldiers if they like, and whoever has fought the greatest number of battles, and slain the greatest number of foes, I will reward when I come back."

"Then Nell don't count," said Jack, "for mother did say her own self that girls never fought in battle; it is only men and big boys who are soldiers."

"If I don't mistake, there's a *little* boy here who will make a very gallant soldier some day," said Uncle Dick, laying his hand for an instant on Charlie's brow, "and in the army which I am recruiting out of this nursery, girls can fight; ay, and well, too."

"I *think* I know what it means," said Harry, in a slightly dissatisfied voice; "it's about being good, and keeping down your temper, and smothering yourself up, when you are all in a blaze to speak out."

"Oh! it's more than that," said Jack; "it's being a hero. I'll look in my history book, and see what are the bravest things to do. Uncle Dick, what's the reward to be?"

"What would you all like? Let me hear your different wishes."

"Oh! beyond everything I should like to go to Aldershot, and to see the camp, and the soldiers at drill," said Harry.

"I want a new box of tools, the very best tools that are made," continued Jack.

"If I only might have a dolly, waxy from top to toe," proceeded Nell, raising lustrous and longing eyes.

"I want a g'ate big wocking horse," said Charlie.

Uncle Dick began to count on his fingers.

"Let me see—

"1st, a day at Aldershot, to see the camp and the drill ;

"2nd, a box of tools, the best to be had ;

"3rd, a waxy doll—yes, Nell, if she be made ;

"4th, a great big rocking horse.

"All right, I shall make a list in my pocket-book, and the bravest child wins."



CHAPTER XV.

"OH! WHAT THOUGHTS!"

"Birch and green holly, boys,
Birch and green holly;
If you get beaten, boys,
'Twill be your own folly."

"Nursery Rhymes of England."

AFTER this, all four children rode a hobby; they rode their respective hobbies hard, they rode them continually.

Nurse said they nearly set her daft, and as she had been out of the room when Uncle Dick explained his plan, she was completely puzzled to know what they were all talking about.

Harry discoursed eloquently upon that day which was sure to come—that wonderful, delicious day at Aldershot. He arranged the train by which he would start, the hour at which he would arrive, and the extensive programme of the delights which would await him. He would dine at the mess, and though he might feel a little too shy—he was not quite sure on this point—to talk to the officers in Uncle Dick's regiment, he could at least look at them, and bring home some of their smart sayings, and independent ways, to rehearse for the nursery's benefit. He would also see the drill, and Uncle Dick's funny camp-home; there might be, too, a "sham fight," for a great many things in Harry's imagination were to be crowded into this one day. He chattered about it when he was getting up and going to bed, when

Annie was brushing his hair, and even when nurse was soaping him, and in consequence he was a little extra impatient during these latter delicate operations.

He also ate untidily, for his busy tongue never ceased, and he had no time to think of crumbs falling to the floor, or whether he was holding his cup of milk straight or crooked.

When he went to his lessons his head was equally full of this all-engrossing subject; therefore his tasks were not perfectly prepared.

Nurse would have enquired pretty sharply into the matter, and perhaps got to the bottom of it, and been spared a good deal of future trouble, but for the fact that the other three children were behaving in just as incomprehensible a manner.

Jack had a box of tools on his brain, a box which contained the most dangerous and terrible implements.

He not only talked of them by day, but he dreamt of them by night. He had nightmares on the subject, in which he would spring wildly about in his cot, and hurl imaginary hatchets at imaginary trees. Poor nurse gave him a nasty black dose of medicine, but it did no good—the dreams and the ceaseless chatter still went on. He used to feel the knives at the breakfast table, and wonder if they were as sharp as those he would soon possess. He would hide one surreptitiously, and try its effects on the handle of a chair, or the side of a table. Nurse felt quite anxious about him.

Nell rode her hobby more quietly. She got all her dolls in a row, and addressed them in a solemn and impressive manner. They were soon to have a queen—a waxy, dimpled, angelic queen. She elected Anna-Maria Jones as servant to her majesty. Anna-Maria must instantly go into hospital, so that the leg which "bleeded bran" might get cured, and she might be ready for her new duties.

The other dolls, Alice Seraphina and Topsy, were to be ladies-in-waiting, and must therefore have new dresses suitable for their coming honours.

Nell did quite a naughty thing here. She cut a slice out of a blue silk frock of her own; it was a very full skirted frock, and she

did not suppose it would be missed, and it would make up so lovely, trimmed with little pink paper flounces, for dollies' new dresses.



"ON CLOTHES'-HORSES."

Nurse very nearly beat her when she found it out; but the strange thing was that Nell could not be brought to see her guilt. She said:

"'Tis 'cause there's a new waxy queen coming, and 'cause the other dolls must have new dresses."

Charlie, too, was not slow in mounting that dangerous steed which Uncle Dick had introduced into the nursery.

He did not talk as much as the others, but perhaps he acted more—he was seized with a sudden passion for climbing. He got on top of wash-hand stands, on clothes-horses, he mounted astride the bars of his own cot, and, even to crown all other misdemeanours, was once found swaying himself across baby's wire-constructed bassinette.

The fact of baby being within made no difference to Charlie. Up and down he jumped, vigorously holloaed, and made the peculiar noise which a horse is supposed to appreciate. "Wa-äy!" he shouted to his imaginary steed; and when nurse rushed at him with a face tragic in her despair, he replied coolly:

"I'se wockin'; I'se widin'; I'se on my g'ate big wockin' horse."

These were bad days for nurse, but there were worse to come. For nearly a week the children talked of their promised rewards—talked of them exclusively and continually; but on the following Sunday, Nell quite accidentally broke the spell, which made these rewards a delightful certainty to their little minds.

CHAPTER XVI.

GOOD LITTLE HISTORY BOOKS.

"All of a row,
Bend the bow;
Shot at a pigeon,
And killed a crow."

"*Nursery Rhymes of England.*"

THEY were sitting in a circle, very much as they had done the Sunday before, only now there was no Uncle Dick in the middle, and Charlie was very fidgetty, and had to listen to more than one admonition from patient Nell.

"There," exclaimed Harry, "I know my hymn at last!" tossing his book up into the air and catching it again.

"'Though I know not what you are,
Twinkle, twinkle, little star,'"

repeated Nell, in a loud whisper. "Yes, I can say it all at last."

"Mine's

'Pitter patter, lickle d'ops wain,'"

said Charlie; "I'se known mine lots time ago."

"We all know our hymns," said Jack, "only, Charlie, that's not a hymn at all of yours; it's only a nursery rhyme. However, don't let's talk about them any more; let's think of something interesting. When I get my box of tools I'll—"

"Oh, Jack, I wonder how big Uncle Dick's room really is at Aldershot?"

"Seraphina won't fit into her new dress," said Nell.

"Oh, bother those dolls," interrupted Jack, in a loud voice.

This remark caused Nell's little face to flush, for she was very sensitive to what seemed like ridicule, and Seraphina was dear to her soul.

"I wonder," she said, after a pause, "which of us will get the prize?"

"I mean to," said Harry. "I have made up my mind about that day at Aldershot, I can tell you."



"Oh! but, Harry, you mayn't be the bravest," continued Nell; "the prize is for the very bravest, and it's a battle that girls can fight in. I don't think," she added, "that any of us have been wonderfully brave this week. I think we have been rather naughty, and poor nurse has looked quite bothered."

"Kite bossered; so her has," said Charlie.

Harry and Jack looked at each other. There was truth in Nell's words. In their eagerness about the prizes they had really forgotten what the prizes were for.

They all sat still for a time, thinking hard; that is, all except little Charlie, who kicked his feet up and down and did not think at all.

At last Jack said—

"There's no use racking one's brains. There are lots and lots of brave things to do. I'll soon find out; I'll study my history book."

Nurse was rather surprised the next morning at the extraordinary behaviour of the twins.

It was a wet day, and there was no stirring out; but during the hour when play was most rampant, and the noise in the nursery generally deafening, there was quite a delicious silence. Jack sat in one corner, Harry in another, and each boy's head was bent over what looked wonderfully like a lesson-book. Nurse could scarcely believe her senses; her curiosity was aroused. She went softly behind the little readers. Yes, there was no doubt at all; each good little boy was earnestly studying a good little improving book, on general history.

Nurse went softly back to her needlework, saying to herself as she sat down with a thankful sigh—

"Well, well! Wonders will never cease, and them boys may be scholards yet."

Presently Jack looked at Harry, and Harry looked at Jack—it was impossible for the twins to do anything long apart—their chairs came close together, and their brown heads touched.

"Jack, I don't think there is any doubt what's the bravest thing to do. I have looked all through my history book, and I know what I'll do."

"I have thought of something too," said Jack, "only the weather must change first. There must be snow for my thing; must there be snow for your thing, Harry?"

"No, no, a pop-gun would do, or a pea-shooter. I can't do it very well alone, though; that's the worst."

"Nor can I do mine very well alone; s'pose we both try together at our first bravest things. Perhaps Uncle Dick will give us both prizes."

"Oh, Jack, I really think he will, for mine is quite the bravest thing in all history, and I mean to do it ; I do, indeed."

"And I mean to do mine," said Jack, "and mine is a frightfully exciting thing. I s'pect we must both keep together, so you may as well tell me yours, Harry."

Harry looked carefully round the room, then he shaded his mouth with his hand in such a manner that Jack alone could see it move, and then he said, in a very solemn stage whisper, with his eyes half shut—

"The very bravest thing in all history is about William Tell and the apple, and I mean to shoot an apple on your head, Jack."

Jack looked profoundly excited. "'Tis splendid," he said ; "will you do it with your pea-shooter or your pop-gun? It ought to be a bow and arrow really, though."

"Yes, but we haven't got one. Mother won't let us have them. I am dreadful 'fraid mother's not at all a brave woman."

Jack considered.

"The pea-shooter will go surest," he said, "but we'll practise with both. Only, Harry, in the story about William Tell, what makes it really so wonderful brave is that he shot an apple off his little boy's head. It would not have been half so fine if he had shot it off the head of a big man like himself. Now you and me's one height ; would it not be better to shoot the apple off Nell's head, or Charlie's head?"

"Nell would shiver," said Harry ; "I know her ways ; she has no real spunk at all, and then the pea or the little bullet we put into our gun—for I think I'll do it with a gun, Jack—would go bang into her eye, and not touch the apple. If you really think you're too big, why, we had better get hold of Charlie. He's a gamey enough little chap."

"We'll practise this afternoon," said Jack, "and we'll do it to-morrow ; it will be easy enough if it is a fine day, for then we can go into the garden, and get Charlie all away by hisself. But if it's wet, why, then we must only go down to our school-room. I really think it is a delicious plan; only I hope the weather won't be wet!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BRAVEST THING IN ALL HISTORY.

"Robt in-a-Bobbin bent his bow."

Nursery Rhymes of England.

THE next day, however, was rather worse than its predecessor, the rain had changed to sleet, and father and mother prophesied cold weather and perhaps frost by-and-bye.

It was impossible to go out, and the boys had to make the best of the opportunity the house afforded them.

Being quite full of their plan, they were wonderfully good and docile in the nursery, and nurse petted them and praised them, and held them up as patterns to Nell and Charlie, who were both a little fractious, and tired of these dreary wet days.

In the afternoon Harry came up to nurse with a grave face and petition.

"Miss Green is not coming to-day, but we want to go down into our school-room—Jack and me—and may we take Charlie?"

"And me, too," said Nell; "I'll bring down all my dollies, and Charlie and me will play with them in a corner."

"Oh, no, Nell! we don't want you a bit. Don't let her come, nurse; we don't want her; we only want Charlie."

"Well, speak more polite, Master Harry. Yes, you have been a good boy this morning, and perhaps you deserve a little treat. Miss Nell, dear, you shall sit quietly by me, and I'll read you a bit

out of your fairy story book. You may go down young gentlemen, if you promise to be very good; but I don't think you had better have Master Charlie, he's only a baby boy, and you are apt to get rough when you are excited."

"No, not me aren't baby," said Charlie, his grammar getting confused in his intense interest; "I are man, and I'll go. All wite, Ha'wy, I'll come."

Charlie in velveteen knickerbockers, a good deal too tight for him, and his golden curls in a perfect tangle, looked very fat, and round, and comical. Nurse could not resist him.

"If you promise to be very good," she said, looking at Harry.

"I should think we are going to be good," he answered. "What do you think of 'the bravest thing in all history?'—only I forgot, you don't know history, nurse. It's a pity, for history does teach one things. I can't tell you what we are going to do, for 'tis a secret; but you may be quite sure if we are going to follow history we are going to be good."

"It does seem a sensible way of passing the afternoon," said nurse, half to herself, and picturing the boys again intent over their books. "Though, for my part, it 'ud seem more natural for them healthy boys to have a romp; 'tis wonderful how they 'as taken to book-learning. Master Charlie, dear, take down your ball," she said to the little one.

When the boys reached the school-room, which was a long low room, scantily furnished with a baize-covered table in the middle, two or three rather sad-looking chairs, and a book case, filled with brown-covered school books, Harry produced from behind his back two pop-guns and two pea-shooters, he also brought forward, with an air of great triumph, a much more dangerous instrument. This was a roughly constructed bow and an arrow made of a piece of stick, pointed as sharply as Jack's rather blunt knife would permit.

"We have got everything but the 'apple,'" said Jack, beginning to jump softly up and down. "I call this bow real clever, I do; I made it up this morning, out of a bit of cane, that was in Annie's drawer. Annie told me last week that she had bought

that cane to make a dimprover to put under her dress on Sundays. Poor Annie, she shall have it back again ; we only wanted it for a loan. Harry, isn't my arrow sharp?"

"Yes," said Harry, "I think it would go quite through an apple ; how *are* we to get an apple, Jack?"

"Oh! Charlie shall go to the kitchen and ask cook for one ; cook's so fond of Charlie since that day he got lost, that I think she would give him anything. Look here, you little man, you run

"I TOLD IT."



off to the kitchen and ask cook for the biggest rosy apple she can find ; run off as fast as you can."

"For me to eat?" said Charlie.

"No, no, never mind ; run and get it."

"Nesser mind; all wite," he said, racing off quickly on his sturdy fat legs.

He returned in about a moment with a large brilliantly red American beauty clasped between his two hands.

"I didn't att for it," he said; "cook warn't there; it was on table, and I 'tole it."

Jack and Harry were too excited to attend to Charlie's morals just then; they seized hold of the apple with exclamations of rapture.

"Oh! I say, it is a beauty; now, Charlie, do you want your rocking horse?"

"A g'ate big wocking horse," said Charlie, raising his blue eyes.

"Well, you can only get it if you are brave; you have got to be brave. I am William Tell, and you are my little son, and you have got to stand there and hold the apple very steady on your head; you are not to blink or scream, for perhaps the first arrow may hit you on the nose or the mouth, and I must go on until I get it right into the apple. Now come along; you aren't afraid, are you?"

"No, I aren't 'fraid of nussing," said Charlie; but then his lip went down with a strange little quiver, and he added, "What did 'ou said about being my dadda? You aren't my dadda; I won't have you for my dadda."

"Oh, it's only a play; don't make a fuss; keep very still; now you won't let that apple drop, will you?"

The apple was heavy, and it took some time to accustom the golden head to this unwonted load.

"I'se sink, I don't like it," said Charlie; "I'se sink, I'll have nusser play now;" and the boy could not get into his head any connection between this rosy apple and his great big rocking horse.

They all three got a little cross and a little excited, but at last Charlie was induced to stand still, with a rather petulant face and eyes most unconscious of danger; while Harry, standing at the other end of the long baize-covered table, prepared to take a deliberate aim.

CHAPTER XVIII.

RATHER FLAT.

"I'll tell you a story,
About Jack-a-Nory,—
And now my story's begun;
I'll tell you another
About Jack and his brother, —
And now my story's done."

"Nursery Rhymes of England."

NURSE could not make out why she felt so very fidgetty. There was really nothing to cause it, for the children were all quite well. Dick had brought a rather important tooth through, and sat, rosy and merry and smiling, in her lap. Nell was sitting in her own favourite little chair, looking at the pictures in her fairy story-book. Her manner was a little subdued, it is true, but then Nell was never a noisy child; and Annie, in the distant window, was sewing rapidly and humming a cheerful air.

Annie was quite a comfort of an under-nurse, clever and obliging, bright with the children, and decidedly a good needle-woman.

Altogether nurse should have felt very cheerful, for all was well in the nursery, and what could happen to those boys in the safe school-room downstairs?

Still, it is a fact that she was fidgetty. She could not turn her attention to Nell's little chatter, and when Dick looked in her face and laughed, she only gave him a half-hearted smile. As she afterwards expressed it to cook, she had a kind of a scare over her.

"There was no manner of reason for it," she explained, "for who would have supposed that innocent history books meant bows and arrows, and firing straight into a little cherub's eyes?"

However, nurse at last rose from her seat, gave baby Dick to Annie, desired Nell in quite a sharp voice to sit still, and went downstairs.

"There's no call to fash," she said to herself, "but I'll just give them a look, and then maybe I'll be easier in my mind."



"AN APPLE PERCHED ON HIS HEAD."

As she approached the school-room, eager and excited voices attracted her attention.

"Oh, Charlie, *do* stand still. How can I hit the apple if you wriggle so? There now, that arrow hit you on the shoulder, and I am sure it would have gone on your forehead at least if you hadn't moved. Jack, perhaps you had beter go behind and hold him."

Nurse opened the school-room door and peeped in. There indeed she saw a sight, which, as she said, froze her up.

Charlie, very red and indignant-looking, was being held firmly down by Jack, an apple perched on his head. Harry, equally red, and evidently on the verge of a fit of passion, was aiming distractedly with a bent bow, and, as nurse expressed it, a murderous pointed thing, directly at the little defiant face opposite to him.

Bang went the bow, off shot the arrow, but, going a little higher than was intended, made a nice sharp scratch on Master Jack's chin.

Jack howled ; nurse flew to the rescue, caught Charlie up in her arms, administered a sound cuff or two on Harry's cheek, then sat down panting, and burst into tears.

"Well, I never! Oh! my little pet! my little love! Master Harry, sir, was you meaning to take out his precious eyes? Oh, won't you catch it for this!"

Harry's passion was so great that he really could not speak for a moment or two ; but Jack, sobbing and rubbing his wounded chin, volunteered a confused explanation.

" It was the bravest thing in all history, and Harry would have done it but for you—you horrid, tiresome, nasty nurse. I was holding Charlie's head still, and the next time it would have gone through the apple."

" I didn't want none oder time," said Charlie, looking up at nurse and nestling in her arms, for he was quite tired of standing still and being scolded. " I'se sink we have had 'nuff of dat p'ay, I do."

Harry stamped with his feet.

" It's a shame ; 'tis a shame," he said ; "twould have been done but for nurse."

" Yes," said nurse, "and my poor little darling without his eyes, perhaps. Come up to the nursery this minute, you two bad boys."

All the rest of that afternoon Harry spent in the night nursery, standing erect on a chair, with his face to the wall. Jack was in a similar ignominious position in the day nursery. Nell cried for sympathy ; and Charlie wondered what it all meant.

Altogether the bravest thing in history, when not carried to a full conclusion, was felt to be rather flat.

CHAPTER XIX.

"*IF THAT ISN'T BRAVE.*"

"The north wind doth blow,
And we shall have snow."
"*Nursery Rhymes of England.*"

THE next morning, nurse condescended to forgive Harry and Jack; and as they promised faithfully never to do such a thing again, and as nurse, with her own eyes, saw the pointed arrow burned, and the cane, which had formed the bow, delivered up to Annie's safe keeping, she decided not to say anything about the matter to Mrs. Humphrey, who, it so happened, was over-powered with numerous engagements at the time.

Neither did the boys tell their mother, though they did confide in Nell. Nell listened, with her eyes very wide open, expressed admiration at the scheme, decided that it *was* very brave, but shuddered a little at the thought of an arrow striking Charlie's eyes.

"But it wouldn't," said Harry; "it might have hit him on the tip of the nose, or perhaps the forehead. It's all fudge about the eyes. There's no doubt about one thing, nurse isn't a bit brave; she *is* a coward, if you like."

"I think, though, it was a little dangerous," said Jack; "my chin smarted dreadful when that arrow banged up against it."

"Well, of course it wouldn't have been brave if there wasn't some danger," was Harry's illogical conclusion. "I only did what William Tell did, and my history book says how very brave he was. I wish nurse had not come in. I should have gone to Aldershot but for that."

After this the boys were silent, looking gloomily out of the window. Harry stuck his hands in his pockets, and whistled a dismal air, and Nell tried in vain to comfort them both.

The weather was still very wretched; snow was falling in soft, large flakes, which Nell and Charlie were never tired of admiring; but Jack and Harry would not condescend to comment upon these beautiful snow-flakes. They were quite tired of the little ones' expressions of rapture; they grumbled, and wished the weather would clear, and made themselves decidedly disagreeable all round.

This state of things continued for a day or two; then there came a sudden and glorious change. The leaden-coloured clouds rolled away, the sky was blue—of that pale, faint tint of blue which comes in winter, and the sun shone for as many hours as the season of the year would permit.

The snow lay now like a soft white mantle over everything; the trees were laden with it, the shrubs drooped under its heavy load, the walks were invisible, and only here and there a dark twig showed where a bed of flowers used to blossom. The snow lay white, and pure, and hard, and the frosty air smelt delicious. The children rose in high glee; all during breakfast they talked of snowballs, of making snow men, of the delights which King Winter brought in his train. They had been in doors for nearly a week, and they were all impatience for nurse to allow them to put on their warm furs and little india-rubber shoes.

Mother, too, sent a message that as they had been indoors for so long, they had better stay out for as many hours as possible on this lovely day.

They did go out; they gambolled, and played, and ran races, and made many snowballs, and chased each other round and round

the metamorphosed garden, and came in with rosy cheeks and enormous appetites for dinner.

So far all went well; but that night, rather on the sly, it is true, the boys might have been seen again perusing their Universal History book. They read together, turning the same page, letting their eager eyes rest on the same fascinating words.

They decided that it would do; that it was glorious; that it was a better plan than the bow and arrow, for it could not possibly hurt anyone, and it must secure them a day at Aldershot and a coveted box of tools.

It only needed an opportunity. Alas! for the little mischief-brewers, that opportunity came in an unlooked-for manner. The next morning nurse had a letter from her son, who was a sailor, begging of her to meet him at the nearest seaport town that day.

Nurse easily obtained Mrs. Humphrey's permission to go. Annie, who was very steady, was given sole charge of Dick, and Jane, the under-housemaid, was desired to look after the older children.

She was directed to dress them as quickly as possible, and take them out to the garden, and in the afternoon Miss Green would see to Jack and Harry.

The children were all fond of Jane; but they could do what they liked with her, and now the two boys' first object was to get rid of her and Charlie. This was not so easy of accomplishment, for Charlie, finding that Jack and Harry were rather uncertain in their attentions, giving him as many scoldings as pettings, began to prefer Nell's company to anyone else's; he could use his own little authority here, and be a bit of a bully in his turn.

"I'se sink I'll stay with 'ou, Nell," he said. "I don't want none oder body p'ay with me, Nell. I'se sink I'd like dat best."

"Oh! nonsense," said Harry; "you can't have Nell always dangling at your heels, you little chap; run up to the lodge gate with him, Jane, and back again—do it two or three times. There, Charlie, do go away."

Nell, who was flattered by the elder boys' unwonted wish for her company, said—

"Yes, Charlie, do go;" and Jane, who dearly loved a gossip at the lodge, finally carried him off in triumph.

"Now, Nell," proceeded Harry, putting his arm through hers, and drawing her rapidly away to the back of the shrubbery, "we have thought of a plan; there's no manner of mistake that this *is*



"YOU HAVE JUST GOT TO LIE DOWN IN A DRIFT."

brave, if you like. There's no doubt that Uncle Dick will give Jack and me our prizes this time."

"And me too?" said Nell.

"Well, of course you have got to do nothing; you have simply got to obey us. We have to do the work; but still you may get that waxy doll."

"'Tis I made up the plan," said Jack; "don't forget that,

Harry, and 'tis twice as good as your bow and arrow, and it *is* brave."

"Yes, it really is," continued Harry, his brown eyes sparkling joyfully. "Come along Nell, come; we have not a moment to lose."

"But what is it?" asked Nell; "what's the plan that is so wonderful and so brave? what is it we have got to do?"

"Oh! *you* haven't to do much; you have just got to lie down in a drift, where the snow is deepest, and we are going to bury you up alive."

Nell turned rather pale.

"I don't think I like that much," she said; "and what does it all mean?"

"O, Nell!" said Jack, "you could not possibly object; we'll cover you all up, every bit of you, but we'll leave a little tiny opening for your mouth, and then you may go to sleep, or pretend to go to sleep if you like. 'Tisn't a bit dangerous; you'll only be froze a bit."

"But what's the good of it?" said Nell. "I don't see any plan in it as yet."

"Oh! you are a stupid! Why Harry and me, we are the monks of St. Bernard; we'll be away up in the bower, which is our monastery, and when we think you're quite cold and froze, we'll come out. We'll have bells and lanterns, and we'll search and search, and sniff and sniff—we ought to be dogs, but we can't help that—and at last we will find you, and we'll dig you out; we'll have saved you alive, that's what we'll have done, and if that isn't brave, I don't know what is."

CHAPTER XX.

THE MONKS OF ST. BERNARD.

"Little girl, little girl, where have you been?"
"Nursery Rhymes of England."



ALK as earnestly as they would, it took the boys some time to arouse Nell to any pitch of enthusiasm; she did not want to lie down in the snow, it would put her fur pelisse in such a mess; she could not be got to see where the bravery came in. She suggested that Jack or Harry should act the part of the dead man or woman, and that she should be one of the monks.

The boys screamed.

"Who ever heard of a girl monk?"

"Well, I'll be a nun, then," said Nell; "a monk and a nun can look for a dead man in the snow; that will do splendid."

"Oh, Nell, it wouldn't do at all. There must be two monks; there really must. Why, you wouldn't be strong enough to dig away the snow, and you wouldn't be strong enough to lift Jack out if he was the dead one. No, no, you must be the dead one, Nell."

Nell finally succumbed with a heavy sigh. She was proud of the big boys finding her help a necessity in carrying out their splendid plans; but she was dreadfully frightened at being buried alive in the snow; and she lay down at last in the drift, with a sinking heart.

"Oh, dear, it does feel so cold to my cheek. Please—please, Harry, don't put too much over me, and do leave a good big opening for my mouth."

"Why, you silly," said Jack, "you won't be there more than five minutes altogether—five or ten at the most; all you have got to do is to freeze, and turn a bit white, so as to look like a dead one. Now you can't think how funny it all seems; there are you under that little mound. You don't feel so bad, do you? Well, you're only common Nell now, and we are only just common Jack and Harry; but in a few moments we'll come back with bells and lanterns, and we'll be great brave monks of St. Bernard; and you won't be Nell any more; you'll be a poor dead one, that we have saved alive. I do call it a splendid plan, and you are very good-natured at last, Nell."

The boys raced off gaily in the highest spirits, and Nell was left alone.

It was rather dark in the shrubbery, and though her head and face were not quite covered, the prospect was not very enlivening.

It was all very well for Jack and Harry to be in such high spirits and excitement; they were to be monks of St. Bernard and to do glorious deeds, but Nell felt that the part of the poor dead one was rather depressing.

Meanwhile the boys retired to their bower, where they hurriedly began to prepare themselves for the great expedition. They had borrowed lanterns from the shepherd boy; Harry had stolen a box of matches, and Jack had surreptitiously removed two large hand-bells from their places.

The boys' father had once been in Russia, and had brought back some of the peasants' sheep-skin clothes. These also were now called into requisition; they consisted of round capes and close-fitting caps, with sheep's ears sticking out at the top.

The boys danced about in their glee.

"We must give her about ten minutes, Jack; ten minutes or a quarter of an hour won't hurt her. She'll be getting a bit stiffish by then."

"All right," answered Jack, "and what name will you be,

Harry? I can't call you Harry when you are turned into a monk!"

"Oh, you had better call me brother—that's what they do; and if you like you can tell the poor dead one, when you are rubbing her hands and trying to bring her back to life, that I'm St. Augustine, and that she was saved by me. There was a real monk of that name, I know."

"Well, but she may be saved by me," answered Jack, crossly; "you seem to take the credit of everything; and it is my plan and all. And what name shall I be, if you're to be St. Augustine? I can't be nothing but brother. What name will you call me?"

"Oh, what a nuisance it is!" said Harry; "I can't think of the name of another monk. Oh! hurrah! There's mother walking out there in the sun; let's run and ask her. She knows lots about those old fellows."

Mother smiled as the two little rosy-cheeked fellows rushed up to her.

"Why, my darlings, you do look well, and where are Nell and Charlie? Do you know," she added, giving the boys no time to reply, "I was looking for you two. Henry the groom brought in some of those new lop-eared rabbits last night; he has them in the hutch, and wants to show them to you. Will you come round with me now?"

Alas for poor Nell in the snow! Alas for the monks of St. Bernard and their brave deeds! Those lop-eared rabbits proved too much for the little giddy lads of between six and seven.

Harry said to himself—

"We'll be very, very quick, and Nell can have a nice nap, and be more like a dead one when we come back."

But Jack forgot his little sister altogether, and his coveted box of tools, and all his longed-for bravery and glory in the strong desire to see those lop-eared rabbits.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE POOR DEAD ONE.

"And when it was night,
So sad was her plight,
The sun it went down,
And the moon gave no light!
She sobbed, and she sighed,
And she bitterly cried."

"Nursery Rhymes of England."



ELL had a truly loyal heart. She did not like lying down in the snow; she quite failed to see where the boys' bravery came in; but having lent herself to their scheme, she would not fail them. If it was necessary for them to prove their bravery by making her very cold, and very messy, and very uncomfortable, why she must submit to her fate. She only hoped that they would not be long,—that the monks would soon appear in solemn procession, with their bells tinkling, and their lanterns glowing, and release her from her disagreeable position.

How soon would she be cold enough and stiff enough to be considered a dead one? She was getting very chilly already, and her feet were wet through; for she had been so warm with exercise when she had lain down, that some of the snow which had got on her stockings had melted.

It is a fact that people who bury themselves in the snow keep comparatively warm; but Nell was not nearly half covered, and she soon began to feel very miserable. Her legs were sticking out, but there was a good sprinkling of snow over the middle of her body, and this too now began to melt and run down in little streams.

She raised her head and listened, and longed for the boys' voices; it must be five minutes, it must be ten minutes since she was left. How unkind of them to stay away from her so long; she was very cold indeed. Now was it possible they had forgotten her? The moment this thought came to Nell, she determined to brave her brothers' displeasure, terrible as it was certain to be, and rise from her snowy couch.

She would pace about near it, and stamp her feet and try to get a little warmth into them, and then when she heard the boys coming she would fly back, and lie down again. Surely this would be, to all intents and purposes, just as good a way of carrying out their extraordinary plan.

Nell was preparing to do this, and it would have been quite possible for her to drag her little person from under the weight of snow which now covered it; but alas! something quite unexpected by any of the children happened at this moment.

Nell was lying in a drift, and above her was piled quite a bank of hard dry snow; but the warmth of her body had softened this bank, and it began to descend, slowly and surely, until a great thick blanket of snow fell over the poor little girl.

She uttered a scream, and managed to free her face, but it was utterly impossible now for her to move an inch; she was really buried in the snow. She called loudly, for she was frightened, and the cold was sending little aches and shivers all over her body; but her voice down in the drift was quite muffled, and in that lonely part of the shrubbery, unless the boys themselves came to her aid, no one else was likely to pass by for hours.

Poor Nell! she sobbed in her distress. Had they really forgotten her? How dreadfully, dreadfully painful the cold was in her legs! And now her hands were icy, and she could not sob very hard nor scream very loud.

Ah! now it was better; the dreadful pain in her legs was going away, and she was getting quite nice and sleepy.

The boys had told her to take a nap; well—so she would, and they might—find her asleep—*when—they—liked.*

CHAPTER XXII.

ABOUT GOSSIP, AND A WALK; ALSO SOME LITTLE REMARKS FROM SOME LITTLE LIPS.

"As I was going along, long, long,
A-singing a comical song, song, song,
The lane that I went was so long, long, long,
And the song that I sang was as long, long, long,
And so I went singing along."

"Nursery Rhymes of England."



JANE enjoyed her gossip at the Lodge very much She sat by the gatekeeper's cheerful little fire, with her feet on the fender, and enlarged upon her grievances; for, of course, Jane had many imaginary grievances.

She spoke about a dress, which was being made for her in the village close by, and also explained to the gatekeeper's wife how she had taken the pattern of missus's last Sunday bonnet. "I put scarlet in my bonnet; and it looks much better than that dull fashionable sort of green," she said.

"You'll wear it next Sunday?" asked Mrs. Jones.

"Yes, and my new dress too," answered Jane.

Thereupon Mrs. Jones went to a wardrobe and brought out a newly made-up garment of her own; and the two women talked very eagerly over its fit, its style, its colour.

All this was profoundly uninteresting to Charlie—the cottage, too, was dull, and he wanted to get out into the bright fresh open air.

He was cross, too, very cross and indignant at being taken off in this baby fashion. Nell was his own especial property; he could do what he liked with Nell, order her about, make her quite his slave; and now she was taken possession of by those big, big, tiresome boys, and he was sent to the Lodge to be out of the way.

He felt that he was being treated quite as a baby, and this thought was agony to his manly little soul. So when he had remarked several times to Jane—

"What did 'ou said?—What's dat?—What sing is 'ou lookin' at?" and found that to each of these remarks there was no answer vouchsafed whatever, he quietly whispered to himself—

"I sink I'll go eit walk 'dain;" and he slipped out of the cottage, unobserved by either Mrs. Jones or the under-housemaid.

He was very glad to be in the open air once more; he laughed and shouted, and clapped his hands and said—

"Now I are man—now I arn't baby no more."

The small gate by the Lodge was a little open, and he got into the grounds again.

"I'll bobolly (probably) find sildrens dis way," he said, and he walked down a side path in a very quick and independent manner. He felt a little offended with "sildrens," and did not intend to pay them much attention when he did find them.

"What nice g'een tee!" he said, touching a holly berry, with a small pink-tipped finger, "and I sink I like snow—it's vedy finny —yes, I do like snow."

He was now in the shrubbery, and it reminded him of the day he was lost there.

"Why dis is where I had my lickle bed," he said, "my duckle, lickle bed, and I saw the wobins; I like dis place."

He walked on leisurely, examining every object of interest that came in his way. He asked many questions out loud, which of course no one was there to answer; he remarked that the holly-berries were very wed, and that there were some leller berries, and some g'een berries on other snow-laden shrubs. Finally he called out gaily—

"Oh! what a g'ate big lot snow! and oh! what's dat sing?"

And then he came plump upon Nell, fast asleep with her little body under the drift, and her pretty pale face lying on her gloved hand.

"Why 'tis Nell," he exclaimed, raising his eyebrows and staring



"NELL, FAST ASLEEP."

at her in delight, "and she's making a duckle lickle bed—same as I did, ite here. I'se sink I'll wake her."

He bent down and began to shout loudly—

"Open zoo eyes! Open zoo eyes! Oh! I can't let she sleep," he said; "I want her to p'ay with me." He began to feel rather indignant, and to shake her, and even pinch her.

But Nell was lying very fast asleep indeed, and did not move or stir or make the slightest response.

"Why she'll have none dinner if she don't wake," he presently exclaimed; "oh! do open zoo eyes, Nell! Do dell me why 'ou has got into dis finny bed?"

But alas! Nell was deaf to all her little playfellow's earnest entreaties; she was very sound asleep indeed, and neither spoke nor moved.

At last Charlie rose to his feet.

"I s'all have to go to mine dinner," he said, "'cause I'se hung'y—and I'll tell dem 'bout Nell den."

Accordingly, a few moments later, a little boy with a red face and very wide-open and earnest blue eyes might have been seen coming panting and puffing towards the house.

Mrs. Humphrey, returning from her visit to the lop-eared rabbits, caught sight of him, and exclaimed in alarm, "Is anything wrong, Charlie?"

"Nussing," he answered; "only I'se hung'y—and Nell, she's fast 's'eep in a finny bed in de snow—and she wouldn't open she eyes—and I couldn't wait any more—'cause I'se cold—and I want mine dinner."

Poor Mrs. Humphrey! And poor dismayed and guilty-looking Jack and Harry! Was it possible that Nell had been lying in that snowdrift for the greater part of an hour?

CHAPTER XXIII.

SO SOUND ASLEEP.

"Faith is like a lily, lifted high and white;
Love is like a lovely rose—the world's delight."

"*Sing-Song.*"



ES, Nell was certainly sound asleep. Though the big boys and Charlie, and Mrs. Humphrey, and Jane and the under-gardener, and even the cook and the kitchen-maid, all found their way in a moment to what Charlie called her "finny bed" in the shrubbery, she did not move nor sigh, nor even show a flicker of her white eyelids.

She certainly was *very* sound asleep, for the commotion was loud and the voices quite agitated.

Cook presently began to cry, which was all that was needed to set the example. Harry caught Jack's hand, and said in a broken, hoarse kind of whisper—

"Oh, Jack, *s'pose* we have let her sleep too long," and then Jack uttered a shrill, loud kind of sob, and rushed away.

The whole party, clustering round the poor little girl, were very much inclined to weep, and, indeed, I think they all did shed some tears, even the under-gardener—that is, all with two exceptions.

These two were Mrs. Humphrey and Charlie.

Mrs. Humphrey did not cry, because she was so terribly frightened; Charlie shed no tears, because he was not frightened at all

"What fuss evellybody's making!" he said; "she's having a nice lickle sleep."

Then Nell was dug out of her snow bed and carried very tenderly into the house, and right up through the day nursery into the night nursery, where mother and Jane and cook went too; and the three boys were left to stare at each other in the day nursery.

"Nell's all wite," said Charlie; "dere's nussing matter wid Nell." But his ignorant and innocent remarks brought no comfort to either Harry or Jack, who huddled down in quite a miserable little heap on the floor.

"If we hadn't forgotten her!" again said Harry.

"Oh, don't!" interrupted Jack. "I think I begin to hate brave things; I wish Uncle Dick had never come, nor told us anything about that horrid, horrid plan."

"'Tisn't ho'wid," said Charlie, who was standing over them, in a decidedly provoking attitude. "I like it, I do; and I'se going to get mine g'ate big wockin' horse, I are."

"Oh, do shut up, you tiresome little chap!" cried both boys; "we don't care whether you like Uncle Dick's plan or not."

Charlie's spoilt baby lips pouted at this indignity. He was not going to make a fuss, however, about a trifle; he turned on his heel and walked to the door of the inner nursery. This he opened, and went in.

Yes, it was warm and nice in the inner nursery. There was a great fire burning, and Nell was stretched on a little mattress before it, and mother was holding her head on her knee, and Jane and cook were rubbing her with hot blankets. She had been taken out of a warm bath, too, and yet—how funny, how very funny—still she slept.

"Oh, when will the doctor come?" said poor Mrs. Humphrey, clasping her hands in agony.

It began dimly to dawn upon Charlie that something was wrong. He glided down on to the floor, and raised his eyes to Mrs. Humphrey's face.

"S'all I att zentle Desus to make Nell open she eyes?" he enquired.

"Oh, do, my darling," answered the poor mother, eagerly clasping the skirts of the little one's faith.

Charlie folded his hands, and shut up his blue shining eyes tight, and said something quickly and in a whisper.

"It's all wite now," he answered, cheerfully; "I did att zentle Desus."

Then he lay flat down beside Nell, nobody preventing him, for Mrs. Humphrey was crying hard herself at last.



"OPEN ZOO EYES, NELL."

"Open zoo eyes, Nell," he said; "'ou has had a nice lickle sleep. Wake up, Nell!" And he kissed her.

Whether it was his very warm breath coming into her open mouth, or whether it was a direct answer to his baby prayer, Nell did move, sighed deeply, and opened her full dark eyes in a puzzled, dreamy manner.

"I thought—" she began. "Oh, Charlie, is it you? And where are the monks of St. Bernard?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONFUSION.

"Margaret wrote a letter,
Seal'd it with her finger."

"Nursery Rhymes of England."



URSE gave it as her unbiassed opinion, that there was something wrong with the children's brains.

She felt it right to state this opinion openly and candidly. When boys who had come to the mature ages of between six and seven took it into their heads to shoot from bows made of cane arrows, sharpened with pocket knives, right into the faces and eyes of little boys who stood opposite ; when these same boys took a rather delicate little girl out into the snow, and laid her in a drift where an avalanche of snow nearly buried her alive—surely there was but one conclusion to come to : their brains must be slightly turned.

Jack and Harry were bad; nurse traced it all to a certain history book; but Nell herself had also been very troublesome, in fact, as nurse expressed it, quite "owdacious," lately; for what could possess a sensible child to cut a whole breadth out of her Sunday best frock? and as to Charlie, well, he was but a baby boy; still his feats in the leaping and climbing way were terrible to behold.

Nurse came back from her holiday to find her whole little kingdom in a sad state of anarchy and insurrection; Jack and Harry

tearful, defiant, half repentant, half angry; Nell in bed with flushed cheeks, and all the symptoms of a heavy cold; Charlie wandering aimlessly about, and finally attaching himself to the baby, whom he called a "duckle lickle sing," and hugged and kissed, thereby exciting Master Dick's ire to such a degree that he commenced to roar, roaring more fiercely and poignantly after each fresh attack in the form of an embrace from Charlie.

Nurse declared that never, never, not if her son wanted her twenty times over, would she go on another holiday, and then she propounded her alarming theory with regard to the state of the



"DUCKLE LICKLE SING."

children's brains to poor frightened Mrs. Humphrey. "I noticed it first, ma'am, to come on serious like when them boys took to them history books; it isn't natural; no, it isn't natural for healthy boys to like reading, and mark my words, ma'am, the poor blessed lambs are all being forced to study too hard."

Mrs. Humphrey made as little as she could of nurse's fears, not seriously believing that either Jack or Harry were over-doing themselves with study; but she owned that she did feel a little startled when Nell awoke out of her trance-like sleep, and instantly inquired for the monks of St. Bernard.

"Their little brains has been worrited," said nurse, "and I don't hold with beginning lessons too young."

"Well, nurse, you must do the best you can," said Mrs. Humphrey. "I think the hour with Miss Green only keeps the boys out of mischief, but you may give them a couple of days' holiday, if you think well. If Nell is all right in the morning, and I trust she will be, I shall have to leave home for a few days. I am very sorry that this should happen just now, for I should like to get to the bottom of the matter. When I spoke to Jack and Harry they only cried a great deal, and said something about Uncle Dick being to blame for Nell being forgotten in the snow. Now really that does seem hard on my poor brother. Well, well, I must inquire into the whole thing more particularly on my return; and you will do all you can to keep the children peaceful and happy in my absence, nurse."

Nurse promised, and as Nell was much better in the morning, although the doctor ordered her to remain in bed for the day, Mrs. Humphrey went off with her husband on some business which was causing them both considerable anxiety at the time. All traces, however, of the storm of yesterday had not yet cleared away; Jack was inclined to blame Harry, Harry recriminated on Jack; there was a great deal of whispered talk about dead ones and monks; about very brave deeds; about lop-eared rabbits; about a box of tools, which might not be won; and a day at Aldershot, which might come to nothing.

The boys went in to see Nell, who was sitting up in bed, looking white and languid, and at first they petted her, and were tender in their commiseration, but presently they began to wrangle again in her presence, and that made her cry.

Then one or two most useful hand-bells were missing; and the valuable Russian sheep skins were dragged in from where they were discovered, wet through in the snow; and the shepherd could not find his lantern.

Jack and Harry feeling themselves in disgrace, grew more and more troublesome; altogether it was a most disagreeable day.

At last that peaceful hour arrived, when each little head was

pressed on its own pillow, and each little busy brain was far away in its world of dreams, and nurse could sit down in peace and comfort in the pleasant day nursery.

Annie was holding baby Dick, and baby Dick was good, so nurse began to carry into execution a plan which had been forming in her mind all day.

This was no less an idea than to write herself to Captain Richard Graham, H.M. — Highlanders, and inquire if he could give her any clue as to the extraordinary change in her well-disciplined children.

She took up her pen and a nice sheet of pink embossed paper, with scalloped and gilt edges.

Nurse's handwriting was not of the best, and her orthography was uncertain, but, in due course of time, she managed to indite the following epistle:—

"HAZELBROOK, *November* 10.

"Honoured and Respected Sir,

"The children's conduct is that peculiar; and as their mother is away, and as I traces the commencement of it to date almost immediate from your last visit, I think it but right to let you know, hoping, as may be, you'll solve the problem.

"First, as to the grooves in which their minds run; Master Harry fancies himself, for sure and certain, a live, full-grown soldier; all his talk is about Haldershot, where your respected regiment is now stationed, and his camp life, even to the messes of dinners, all most ill-becoming to so tender a boy. Master Jack takes up carving knives fearful, and talks in a way enough to distract you, about implements full of danger, knives, and hatchets, and saws, and such like. Miss Nell is more quiet, but she's dreaming over and over, in a way distressing to listen to, of a doll made all of wax with never a bit of bran in it, even in the middle, which is a thing, as far as I'm acquainted, quite impossible to find. Master Charlie then, he talks of a rocking horse, and, of course, such things there be; but when he jumps on top of the baby's bassinette, and dangles his legs within an inch of the blessed pet's nose, and says he's on his rocking horse, it comes to be past bearing.

"Then—and secondly, respected sir—I comes to hactions.

"The twins ain't what you call out-and-out bad boys; they're lively, they're owdacious, they are spirited enough, and always difficult to manage with regard to their lessons; still there ain't nothing really bad in the boys. Mrs. Humphrey thought as Miss Green quieted them, and may be she did for a bit; but I never held with forcing tender brains, and the fruit of too much learning 'as turned out in their cases awful.

"A few days ago, I remarked as the young gentlemen took, in a very seemly and becoming manner, to their history books; they seemed wonderful steady and quiet. Respected and honoured sir, what was the result of that unnatural course of study? First, a-trying to blind Master Charlie with a bow and arrow, and a happle stuck on the top of his head; second, a-laying of Miss Nell out in the snow-drift and letting a heap of snow fall on the top of her, and then a-forgetting of her and leaving her there, until she was almost dead, and had to be dug out and brought to with hot blankets and blazing fires, all as if she wasn't a Christian at all, but an Icelander.

"This and the losing of the handbells, and the shepherd's lantern, and the valuable Russian sheepskins, is the distracted state of our household just now. And when I speaks to the children, all they say is 'Uncle Dick'; and though I knows as they lay the blame on you, respected sir, in a most unnatural manner, yet ef you could throw any light, it would be a relief to your perturbed and humble servant,

"MARTHA VICKERY."

This letter in due course of time reached Captain Graham, and on the following morning, two interesting-looking envelopes, each bearing the highly ornamental crest and coat of arms of the — Highlanders, were laid upon the nursery breakfast table.

One was directed to nurse, and was for her own special and private edification; the other, a nice, fat, square, creamy-looking letter bore the following inscription, indited in a manly hand:—

"To Messrs. Harry and Jack Humphrey, Miss Ellen Humphrey, and Master Charlie Ross,

"The Nursery, Hazelbrook,

"Near M——, ——shire."

This letter was opened eagerly with a blunt penknife, and was spread open before Jack, who could read this printed writing without any very great difficulty :—

"Private and confidential ; in my camp room, Aldershot."

"My dear Boys, and my little niece, Nell,

"The Bravest is the good child. The child who does what he doesn't like, because he is told to do it. The child who overcomes himself, and would rather the other children were happy than himself. Ask mother to tell you exactly what I mean. —Your affectionate uncle,

"DICK GRAHAM.

"P.S.—Prizes for the brave :—

1. A day at Aldershot.
2. A box of tools.
3. A waxy doll.
4. A great big rocking horse."

CHAPTER XXV.

CHARLIE MAKES UP HIS MIND TO BE KITE, VEDY DOOD.

"Not one could tell, for nobody knew,
How the dainty little blossom grew;
* * * * *
Not one could tell, for nobody knew,
Why love was made to gladden a few."

Eleanor Kirk.



ACK read this letter aloud. When he had finished, Nell said, "I'd like to hear it once more," and when he had gone through it a second time, Charlie demanded—"Wead it 'dain, p'ease—I want to hear 'bout my wockin horse 'dain."

"You think of nothing but the prize, you little chap," said Harry, which was rather unfair, as he himself also had been much occupied with this portion of Uncle Dick's plan.

There was no further comment, however, made on Uncle Dick's letter, and breakfast proceeded, in almost silence, each child, even Charlie, being engaged in thinking hard.

When breakfast was quite over Jack and Harry went off to consult or to play in private, and Charlie and Nell were left alone.

Immediately Charlie ran up to Nell and said,—

"I mean to be vedy b'ave, mine own self, I do."

"Oh! Charlie, I wouldn't," said Nell, puckering her brows and looking at him with anxiety. "I am getting dreadfully frightened

about brave things, I am indeed; and Uncle Dick said in his letter this morning that brave things didn't mean brave things, they meant good things, and I don't know what he means; but if that's the case, there is no use in copying the brave things in the history books. Oh! Charlie, I really do think we had better not try any more about that prize until mother comes home. We can ask mother on Sunday what it all means."

"But I know," said Charlie; "mine own musser tellt me, and I know kite well. I mean to be b'ave, and do a vedy dood lickle sing." And then he laughed gleefully, but finding that Nell still shook her head, he ran away from her, rather disgusted with her want of sympathy. Charlie sat down in a corner and began to think deeply, that is deeply for three years and a half.

Uncle Dick's letter had been far more intelligible to him, than any of the other children supposed. The words "good child" had sounded in his ears as a very sweet and familiar phrase; his own mother, his own far-away and beloved mother, had so often asked him to be good, and had explained to him in quite plain little baby words the meaning of this great grand idea; she had drawn vivid little pictures of the children who only pleased themselves, who never tried to keep down their naughty tempers, and who were disagreeable boys and girls, and also of those children who, helped by God, overcame their weak little selves, and were obedient and unselfish; she had explained to him also how bravery and goodness went together, and the small man remembered it now, and sat down to think it over in a methodical fashion, peculiar to himself.

It is only fair to Charlie to say that in these thoughts he absolutely forgot the rocking horse; he was so very much interested in trying to find out what his mother would like, in trying to discover how he could be very, very good, and very, very brave, that the prize itself quite faded from his memory. Nurse, whose mind had been partly relieved by Uncle Dick's private letter, but who began to feel suspicious now of any child who sat quietly in a corner, soon routed Charlie out of this retreat, and sent him, well wrapped up in his overcoat and sailor hat, into the garden.

Nell had not yet sufficiently recovered from the effects of her chill to leave the warm nursery. Charlie had, therefore, to content himself with walking up and down in a very sober and dull fashion with Annie.

His thoughts were still busy about the brave thing he had got to do, and at last he made up his mind, that it must be something he didn't like, and it must be something that would help another person.

"It san't be somesing miggling dood—it s'all be somesing kite, kite vedy dood," he said, aloud.

"What are you talking about, Master Charlie?" inquired Annie.



"HE SPILT HIS MILK AT TEA-TIME."

"Nussing you could underland," he replied, in an offended tone, and he went into the house quite full of his idea. During the rest of that afternoon Charlie was on the watch for some great act of self-denial. The natural consequences followed. He forgot the small duties that lay in his path; he made a great mess at his dinner; and he spilt his milk at tea-time, and when Nell asked him to come and play with her dolls, he said,—

"I can't, 'cause I'se sinkin'." He presently determined that the great act of self-sacrifice which he meditated should be performed for the sake of nurse; he, accordingly, attached himself to nurse, and watched her movements in a way which rather worried that good woman.

"Who's 'ou witin' to?" he asked, when in a moment's interval she took up pen and paper.

"Oh! my dear little boy, I am writing to my poor son, and I want the letter to catch him before his ship sails. It's very important about this letter," continued nurse, half aloud, and forgetting she was addressing so young an auditor, "because I am putting in a post-office order for five pounds, and I hope it will get into the post in good time."

"I know; you'll pop him in lickle hole," said Charlie; "you mustn't hab no noise 'cause you can't wite if there's noise. I'll keep dose sildrens kite kiet." And away he trotted into the day nursery.

"Hush," he said to Nell; "nurse is witin'; she's witin' to she boy 'fore his sip sails."

"Oh, his ship is going to-morrow afternoon," said Harry; "I know, it's the *Thunderer*, and it's on the lists to go; there is no use in nurse writing; at least, if she does, she must catch the next post."

"No, a very early post in the morning will do," said Jack. "I know I'm right," he added, "because nurse told me so." Charlie listened with his heart in his mouth. He became intensely anxious about the fate of that letter, and walked backwards and forwards between the day and the night nursery in a way most annoying to nurse, who was a very slow writer, and who was obliged to concentrate her full attention on her penmanship whenever she took it in hand.

"Are sildrens keepin' kite kiet? is zoo letter wedy to pop in lickle hole?" were two out of twenty questions with which he tormented her.

"Well, well," she said presently, shutting up her portfolio in despair. "No, Master Charlie, it ain't finished, nor like to be. There! why, it's time to undress that blessed babe. I must only hope to get the letter done in time for the early post to-morrow morning. Annie, come and fetch that hot water for the bath, quick!"

Nurse put her letter away, and Charlie retired with a little sigh. He had really done his best to help her, and it was extremely pro-

voking, when the letter was so important, that it should not be finished and off poor nurse's mind.

Dick was very fractious that evening, and cried a great deal, and nurse had not another moment to resume her writing.

"Is zoo letter finished?" asked Charlie, as she tucked him up for the night.

"No, my pet," she answered, "but I'll get it done by hook or by crook to-night, and then it must go into the nearest post and take its chance."

"Take its sance," echoed Charlie, and then he shut his eyes.

He was quite excited, however, and could not sleep.

His cot had been moved close to Nell's, and, by stretching his arm through the pretty gilt bars, he could touch her.

He raised himself now on his elbow, put out his hand, pulled Nell's long hair, and said,—

"Nell, what's a post?"

"Oh! a stick or a plank driven into the ground," answered sleepy Nell.

"But it must have lickle hole in it," said Charlie; "posts in London hab lickle holes, and are painted wed."

Nell made no response; she was fast asleep by this time.



CHAPTER XXVI.

"AR'N'T ZOO GLAD?"

"Here stands a post;"
Who put it there?
A better man than you;
Touch it if you dare!

"Nursery Rhymes of England."



HARLIE lay awake for the space of ten minutes. During that time he thought anxiously about nurse's letter, about its chance of getting finished, and about the nearest post. Where was there a pillar-box, such as he was accustomed to seeing in London? He was quite in the habit of taking his mother's letters out, and, assisted by his nurse, dropping them into the neat little hole made for the purpose.

He thought and thought, but he could not recollect any nice box, painted red, at Hazelbrook.

He sighed and turned restlessly on his pillow.

"I hasn't done one dood b'ave sing yet," he said, "but I'se tying, I are tying."

Then he dropped asleep to dream of nurse and letters and pillar-boxes, all in a confused sort of way. These dreams made him restless, and, contrary to his wont, the little fellow found himself broad awake somewhere about midnight.

He sat up in his cot and looked about him. It was profoundly

still in the nursery. Nurse was lying with her back to Charlie, and her arm thrown protectingly over Dick's cot.

Nell and the two boys were breathing in a soft blissful manner; the night-light was burning, and some gleams were coming in at the window.

These gleams of light were caused by the moon, but Charlie mistook them for the dawning of day.

"It's kite smornin," he said. And then he thought of nurse and her letter and the nearest post. For a moment he felt inclined to wake her, for it would be such a pity if the letter was not in time for her son; then he changed his mind. Poor nurse, it would be a pity to disturb her, for she was snoring loudly, and she must be very tired. Why could not he get up and post the letter his own self? He was very sleepy, quite dreadfully sleepy, and he did not at all enjoy the idea of putting his feet upon the cold floor; but was not this just the good little brave thing he had been looking for all day? He would be helping nurse, and doing something he did not like himself.

"Wasn't it well as I waked!" he said, "for it's kite smornin; and won't nurse be glad when I tell her as she letter is posted!"

These thoughts passed very quickly through his baby mind, and were as quickly acted upon. He got very softly out of his crib, and ran with his bare feet across the floor; no one heard him, for he was careful not to make the least sound.

The door, leading into the day nursery, was open, and as there was a little fire still in the grate, he could see the objects in the room. He trotted eagerly about, looking for the precious letter. He was not long in discovering it. It lay on the top of nurse's work-basket, all neatly sealed and with a fresh stamp on it.

He clasped it in his dimpled hands, and ran gaily out of the room. It was certainly very cold, and he wished he had remembered to put on his crimson flannel dressing-gown, but it was not worth going back now, for it was so important to get that letter into the post. So he ran along the passages, guided by the light of the moon, which was flooding everything, until he came to a little postern door, which he knew very well, as he had often been in

and out of the house by this entrance with Jack and Harry. He was particularly fond of this door, because he could turn the handle himself, and it so happened on this particular night that one of the footmen had left it on the latch, meaning to come in by this means a little later than he ought.



"IT LAY ON THE TOP OF NURSE'S WORK-BASKET."

Charlie opened the postern door, and instantly found himself in the large yard, which communicated with the stables, the barns, the cowsheds, etc., and which ran at the back of the house.

Oh! it was cold here. The little fellow shivered, and a light breeze caught up his bright hair and tossed it about.

Now, where should he find a pillar-box! where, where should he find the nearest post!

He looked about him eagerly. All the objects in the yard were rendered plain by the brilliant light of the moon ; and what, what was that in the distance? Something tall and slender, and painted red. Charlie's heart gave a bound. He rushed towards this solitary object with glad little steps, which forgot cold and all the inconveniences of poor, naked little feet, in his burning desire to do a good, brave deed, and help nurse's son to get his letter.

"He sall get his letter," he said ; "he sall get his letter 'fore his sip sails, he sall."

He soon reached the pillar which was painted red ; yes, it was all quite right ; it was without any doubt a postal pillar, just the same as those in London, which he knew so well ; just the same, only a little taller, and a little slighter, and with a rather different kind of hole. Still, he could reach the hole, and by doubling the letter, and squeezing it hard, and cramming it tight, he could get it through.

He did so, and then ran back through the yard, clapping his hands, and in high glee.

He was so excited at the success of his feat that he was quite noisy in his manner of re-entering the nursery.

Nurse sat up in bed to see a little white-robed figure, coming in a succession of bounds and skips across the floor.

"Oh! good gracious! Why, Master Charlie, where have you been?"

"I'se been in y-a-ard," said Charlie, raising his brows, and opening his blue eyes to their widest; "I waked, and 'twas smornin, and I posted zoo letter ; I posted him mine own self ; aren't I dood?"

Poor nurse fairly stumbled out of bed.

"You must be dreaming, child," she said. "Oh! my heart alive! he's all froze up. Master Charlie, what have you been doing?"

"I was in yard," repeated Charlie. "I wan into nursery, and I got zoo letter, and I posted him in big wed pillar-box. Dere was a finny lickle hole, and I doubled him up, and skeezed him in, and him's posted all wite now. Isn't zoo vedy glad?"

"Glad? glad?" said nurse, "glad?" She sat down on the side of the bed; she was utterly incapable of any movement for the space of half a minute. A thought passed rapidly through her mind, that all the children must be possessed, for her letter, her precious letter, with its enclosure of five pounds, had been posted in the pump!



CHAPTER XXVII.

"*WE'RE ALL VERY UNHAPPY, SERAPHINA.*"

"Tweedle-dum and tweedle-dee
Resolved to have a battle,
For tweedle-dum said tweedle-dee
Had spoiled his nice new rattle."

"*Nursery Rhymes of England.*"



INSTEAD of thanking Charlie, instead of praising him and petting him for his good deed, nurse felt very much inclined to give him a flogging. She only restrained herself because she did not approve of floggings generally, and she was also alarmed about his health, for he was really bitterly cold. So, scolding him all the time, she put him into bed, and warmed some milk, and made him drink it. And then she told him, he was a very, very naughty boy and that he should receive the worst punishment known at Hazelbrook ; he should stay in bed all day to-morrow. Charlie roared, but nurse did not pay the least attention. She was too busy dressing herself, and giving the baby into Annie's charge, and then going off to wake the men, in order to ascertain if anything could be done about recovering her letter and her postal order from the pump.

Poor nurse! she was certainly cruelly aggravated, and no one can blame her for failing to read the little motive, or being unable to perceive the earnest desire. But all the same, she left a tender baby heart, for the time being, almost broken.

"I want musser," sobbed Charlie, covering his little face under the sheets. "I *are* dood; I didn't like natty cold floor; and I didn't like natty cold yard; and I did want to help nurse; and I

posted she letter, I did. Musser would say, 'I are b'ave dood boy;' musser would underland."

Very likely mother would; very likely, had mother been there, she would have got to the bottom of the poor little baby thought, and shown the child where he went wrong. But then mother was not there, she was very ill, and hundreds of miles away, and certainly no one else did understand anything at all about the matter.

The whole of the next day Charlie spent alone and in bed. He was a little ill, for he had caught a severe cold in the yard, and though Annie was allowed to sit by his bedside, the Humphrey children were forbidden to go near him.

Nurse was decidedly cross and uncome-atable, for it was declared to be impossible to rescue her letter from the pump; and though the postal order might be stopped, and the money eventually restored to her, yet it was quite out of the question for her son now to receive his five pounds or his mother's parting words before he sailed. Nurse was therefore in a bad humour, and Nell did not dare to petition to be allowed to sit with Charlie.

The next day the little fellow's punishment was declared to be at an end, and he came back to the nursery in apparently his usual spirits.

There was, however, a slight change, rather difficult to define, in the poor little man.

He was wild and gay and full of fun; indeed, Jack and Harry admired him rather more than ever; but he took an absolute pleasure in disobeying nurse. He defied her; he was fearless with regard to her punishments; twice she caught him acting his rocking horse on baby's cot; and he ate three lumps of sugar when her back was turned, though he generally professed himself too manly to care for sweets.

During the quiet hour after dinner he woke baby twice; he stole Harry's knife and was found surreptitiously opening it, and cutting holes in nurse's best band-box; he was rude to Nell, and nearly broke her heart by saying,—

"Zoo's only dirl, and I are man, I are."

He pronounced his determination to play with Jack and Harry, and with them only, and then he quarrelled and fought, because he was not allowed to have all the toys and to choose all the games. In short, he was, what nurse had supposed him to be two nights ago, a very naughty little boy indeed.

"Oh! Charlie, can't you try and be good?" said patient Nell, when, after dealing several blows at Harry, he had been put into a corner by nurse.



"CUTTING HOLES IN NURSE'S BEST BAND-BOX."

"I aren't nesser doin' to be dood 'dain," sobbed the culprit, with his back to his anxious little questioner.

After this Nell was so utterly astonished and distressed, that she sat down in the middle of her dolls, took Anna-Maria Jones on her knee, and addressed Seraphina and Topsy with the lugubrious sentence,—

"We're all very unhappy, all together, and I don't think I like Uncle Dick's plan at all."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HIS LICKLE LETTER.

"So I sow beans, and so they come up,
Some in a mug, and some in a cup.
I sent a letter to my love,
I lost it, I lost it!
I found it, I found it!"

"Nursery Rhymes of England."



ACK and Harry, after reading Uncle Dick's letter once aloud, and once or twice to themselves, put it away on a top shelf where they kept their bats and some other toys. Nell inquired if they knew what it meant, and if they were quite sure of Uncle Dick's meaning. They answered carelessly that it was all right, and then refused to allude to the matter. Nell felt that this was no explanation to her own confused little mind, but she comforted herself with the reflection that mother would be certainly back on Saturday night and that on Sunday she could talk to her and get some true explanations from her.

"Uncle Dick said mother would tell us, and she shall speak to darling little Charlie, for he's so put out about something. Mother will tell us all what are the brave and the good things to do,' thought this wise little girl.

She was quite happy when she remembered mother's return.

But alas, there was a disappointment in store for all the children!

On Saturday, instead of mother herself, there came a telegram to nurse announcing the disagreeable news that some days must still elapse before she could be with them. Nell fairly cried, but the boys whistled, and pretended not to care.

Uncle Dick's letter to nurse, which she had read carefully several times to herself, had given her a slight inkling into the state of the children's minds, and as Mrs. Humphrey had not come back, she determined on Sunday to read them all a little private lecture on being good. Nurse's mode of delivery was decidedly dull, her metaphors the reverse of inspiriting, and her old-fashioned ideas had rather the effect of confusing and puzzling the children.

Nell tried hard to understand; Jack and Harry said, "Oh yes, it's all very fine, but Uncle Dick is not going to give us our prizes just to make things so deliciously comfortable for you; why, if we were never naughty, and always perfect like that, you'd have no trouble at all, nurse; I am sure Uncle Dick doesn't mean that we're to keep like mice when baby's asleep, and to learn our lessons so wonderful perfect, and never to stir when you are brushing us."

"And not to scream out in that dreadful way when your face is being soaped, Master Harry," said nurse, in a severe tone.

"I aren't doin' to be dood nesser now," said Charlie, kicking his heels.

Nurse's lecture was decidedly a failure.

On Monday morning there was quite a commotion at the breakfast table. Again two letters arrived by the post: one for Nell from her mother, and one for Charlie from his mother.

Nurse said that Charlie's letter was undoubtedly from his mother, because it had the Algiers post-mark, and was written on thin, foreign paper, and as it was the first he had received, it caused great excitement all round. Nell's letter was opened very carefully with Harry's penknife, and its contents disposed of; and then the children turned to Charlie.

"Now let's see yours," said Jack.

"Throw it over, old fellow," said Harry, "and I'll open it for you;" and he brandished his open penknife dangerously near the baby's face.

Charlie was clasping his letter tight and looking around him defiantly.

"I aren't doin' to," he said; "dis is mine letter, and 'ou san't have him."

"Oh! but to read," said Harry; "throw it over this minute; you can't read it yourself, you know."

"Nesser mind; dis is mine letter, and 'ou san't weed him; none sildrens sall weed mine letter.'

"Nurse, make him give it to us," said Jack; "it's so absurd his holding it like that when he can't read it."

"Give it to me, Master Charlie," coaxed nurse; "I'll read your mother's letter to you, darling."

Charlie hugged the precious epistle still tighter.

"No, sank 'ou," he said, looking very fierce; "no one sall weed mine musser's letter; 'ou san't open him; no one sall open him."

Harry and Jack now made a raid upon the little angry fellow, and but for nurse's prompt interference, the letter would have been torn out of his hot little hands.

"Let him alone! He'll show it to me presently," she said.

Charlie retreated into the night nursery, and sitting down in a corner with his face to the wall, he spread out the crumpled epistle on his knee. He did not attempt to take it out of its envelope, but when no one was by, he raised it to his lips and kissed it several times; then he tucked it into the pocket of his little sailor jacket and walked back triumphantly to the day nursery.

"None sildrens shall weed mine letter," he said, firing out his words in a way most tantalizing to the big boys, who could with difficulty keep their hands off him.

He began the day in his most troublesome mood, and made himself really disagreeable all round. He was thoroughly refractory, and the disobedience which had begun last week arose to serious heights that morning.

Nurse punished and punished, but Charlie defied her corners, and laughed when he was put to stand on a table with a handkerchief over his face. She tried putting him in a room all by himself, but when she presently peeped through the key-hole, she

found him reclining full-length in an easy-chair, and talking in a delighted and thoroughly happy way to his letter.

"Mine duckle lickle letter! zoo sall nesser, nesser be opened; I lobes zoo, zoo duckle lickle sing."

Nurse took him out of his banishment, and then Jack and Harry began to tease him and threaten to steal the letter, which they saw sticking out of his sailor coat pocket. He became anxious



"WATERED IT PLENTIFULLY."

and excited and was always darting away in alarm from Jack and Harry.

That afternoon he found himself alone in his garden, and then the fertile idea occurred to him, that he would plant his letter. Then, and then only, it would be quite safe, and no one could possibly open it.

He had a little trowel and a watering-pot and all necessary implements for gardening, and he now made a rather deep hole and stuck the letter in, and covered it hastily up; and then he ran

and filled his watering-pot and watered it plentifully, as he had seen the elder boys watering the seeds which they had freshly sown.

"Mine duckle letter," he said, "no one sall open him none times, now him's planted. And him'll g'ow," he said, clasping his



"KISSED THE WET GROUND."

hands, and his face flushing as this delicious idea occurred; "him'll g'ow, and will come up a lickle t'ee, all full of letters w'ote by mine musser. I sink dere will be wed and g'een and leller letters on mine lickle t'ee."

Then he stooped down and kissed the wet ground under which the poor letter lay buried, and walked back, a dirty but contented little boy, to the house.



CHAPTER XXIX.

SHUT UP THE LETTER, DEDANE.

"Love your own, kiss your own,
Love your own mother, hinny,
For if she was dead and gone,
You'd ne'er get such another, hinny."

"Nursery Rhymes of England."

FOR the rest of that day Charlie felt quite happy. His letter was absolutely safe at last, and it was so nice to reflect that there would be a whole harvest of letters coming up in his garden by-and-bye.

He knew that seeds generally took from a week to ten days before they appeared above the ground, so he must not look for that tree which was to bear mother's letters in so many charming colours for the present.

But he told himself that he was perfectly content to wait.

He was a child with a considerable amount of reserve in his character, and he did not find it at all difficult to keep his secret from Nell and from the boys.

They asked him several times where his letter was, but a short little "Nesser mind" was all they could get from his rosy lips. The thought of the treat in store for him in his garden made him happy, and in consequence his conduct improved, and nurse once more restored him to her favour. All went well until the morning of the next day, when Nell, with a solemn and dignified air and a napkin tucked securely under her chin to keep her from inking

herself, sat down to answer her mother's letter. She had a sheet of clean paper before her, and she dipped her pen in the ink her own self, and nurse sat by to hold her hand and guide her weak little attempts at writing.

"What's 'ou doin'?" said Charlie, coming close, standing on tip-toe, and opening his eyes wide.

"I am writing to mother," said Nell. "Of course mother's own letter has got to be answered; it's dreadful rude not to answer people's letters."

"Dedful wude," echoed Charlie, and he retreated slowly to the other end of the nursery.

What a stupid little boy he was! for of course his mother would think him "dedful wude" if he did not answer her letter, even though it was buried in the garden, and was to come up a little tree. Of course he must write to his mother, he must write to her at once; but he was considerably puzzled how to manage this feat, for he could not at all aspire to Nell's attempt at penmanship. The most he could manage was a zig-zag line right down the paper, or, by taking pains, he might do something which would look as if a spider with ink on its legs had run about on it. He feared his mother would find such an epistle difficult to read, and yet she *must* have her letter.

He thought and thought, and at last watching his opportunity (he was really not at all an obedient little boy at this time), ran out of the nursery. He felt still too indignant with all the nursery party to ask any of them to aid him, but Jane, the under-housemaid, was a favourite of his, and he would go to her. He found her in her bedroom, busily engaged curling her front hair by the aid of a slate pencil which she was heating in a candle, lighted for the purpose.

He always called her "*Dedane,*" and he now rushed into the room in considerable excitement. He was full of his own project, but the sight of the lighted candle, and Jane's remarkable operations with it, caused him to stop for a moment.

"What's 'ou doin', Dedane?"

"Oh! Master Charlie, sir, you has put me in a fluster," said

Jane, blowing out her candle, and turning round very red in the face.

"Nesser mind," continued Charlie, excitedly; "'ou's got to wite; 'ou's got to wite for me to mine musser. It would be dedful wude if I didn't send letter to mine musser. Him's got to be wote, and ou's got to wite him. Sit down dectly." Charlie took hold of both of Jane's hands, and drew her towards the table, and pushed her into the chair.

"Oh! lor', Master Charlie, ain't you the funniest little gentleman!" she said, laughing, and preparing to obey.

"Yes, aren't I finny!" he replied, "but 'twould be zeal dedful wude not to wite to mine musser dectly. Get 'ou pen, and 'ou paper, and let's begin; 'ou wite, and I'll tell 'ou what say."

Jane's caligraphy was only a shade better than Nell's; she had, however, a small store of very thin and poor white paper, and a rusty pen, and a penny bottle of ink, and producing these implements, she sat down giggling and choking with laughter. Charlie, on the contrary, was very solemn, and his face extremely red and flushed.

"Is 'ou wedy?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir. What shall I put on the beginning of the paper?"

"Put 'mine musser' dere," he said.

Jane bent her head until her nose nearly touched her hands, and scrawled some lines, which bore a faint semblance to two words.

"Has 'ou put 'mine musser,' Dedane?" asked Charlie, in a severe voice, standing bolt upright by her side.

"Oh! yes, sir, it's writ after a fashion."

"All wite, go on dectly. Say dis now, 'I'se lonely boy.'"

"Yes, sir, I've wrote that too," answered Jane, after a laborious pause.

"I'se dedful tired of nurse and of Nell."

"Oh! lor', Master Charlie."

"Say, 'I'se dedful tired of nurse and of Nell,' when I tell 'ou, Dedane."

Jane wrote obediently.

Charlie held up his fat fingers, and began to count.

"'And I'se tired of Haw'y and of Dack, and of de lickle baby, and I wants to go home to zoo, musser; I'd like to see my dadda too. I planted zoo letter in mine garding, and I 'spect him will come up tee, wid lickle leller and wed letters on him. Aren't I finny!'"

Here Charlie paused.

"Is that all, sir?" asked the patient Jane.

"I 'spect dat's all," he answered; "sut up de letter now, Dedane, and put him in de lickle hole, where mine musser can get him. I 'spects mine musser will say him's a duckle letter."



CHAPTER XXX.

ABOUT SODA WATER BOTTLES AND NELL'S NURSERY.

"Hushy baby, my doll, I pray you, don't cry,
And I'll give you some bread and some milk by-and-bye."
"*Nursery Rhymes of England.*"



JACK and Harry understood Uncle Dick's words far better than the younger children. Ever since that dreadful day when they had crouched together on the floor in the day nursery, and had wondered in fearful whispers if Nell would ever open her eyes again, the true meaning of what their soldier uncle intended by brave deeds began to dawn upon them. When his letter came they were not unprepared for it. They said very little, only looked at each other; but to nurse's intense relief, they ceased to search through their history books, they learned their lessons neither better nor worse than other boys, and slowly returned to their normal state.

Then came the disappointment about mother's coming home, and nurse's dull little lecture on Sunday afternoon.

On the evening of that same day the twins put their heads together, and commenced an eager whispering.

"Harry," said Jack, "do you mean to give it up?"

"What?" asked Harry, though he knew very well, and avoided Jack's eye as he spoke.

"Why, Harry, your day at Aldershot, your 'licious day with

Uncle Dick's own self; and him praising you; and you having done the bravest thing."

Harry sighed.

"I am always dreaming of it," he said, "always, always; I think of it about every minute, but I don't like those new brave things. Anyone can do them, and yet they're hard. Fancy, making everything square for nurse like that. Wouldn't she crow over us! I don't see why we're to try so desperate hard to be good just to make things nice for nurse."

"Oh! mother did say something about God being glad," said Jack, in quite a new serious little voice for him, "but I'll tell you, Harry, what's my plan. 'Tis perfectly horrid about always keeping in your temper; and that soaping and brushing the little tangly knots out of your hair—why, nurse won't know when she hurts us if we don't scream. We've got to do it, that's plain, for we must get the prizes, and if it comes to that I am going to have a little bit of cork in my mouth, and when nurse tugs at my hair I'll bite the cork hard, and that will keep me from screaming out. That will do when the time comes. But, Harry, Uncle Dick mayn't come again for a long, long while, and my plan is this! let's take a holiday for a week."

"Oh! Jack, what do you mean?"

"I mean, don't let's begin to be brave for about a week; let's be darling 'licious naughty for a week."

Harry's eyes began to sparkle, and he pushed one hand through his curly hair.

"Shan't I scream to-night," he said, "and shan't I let out at Annie when she's soaping me! Oh! Jack, I wonder is it right?"

"Of course it is," said Jack; "we'll be ever so much gooder when we have gone off a bit first. 'Tis like a soda water bottle, pop, bang, and then it's quiet. It will be quite easy to be good next week if we have a holiday and can do what we like this week."

"I really think so, too," said Harry; "I never remembered the soda water bottles. Don't they lie dead-like after making all that fizz! and, of course, we'll be quite dead next week, and 'twill be as

easy as possible to be good and brave. I really think it's a lovely plan, Jack. Let's think now what we'll do while we are having holiday and letting off the fizz."

"We won't learn our lessons," said Jack. "It's very, very important that part, for we'll have to do them so perfect next week; and I do want dreadfully, dreadfully, to go to the village to get my knife sharpened; I know the blacksmith would do it, and we might see his jolly fire in a blaze, and watch him hammering and the sparks flying."

"And we might climb that tree, and drop down to the road that way," said Harry; "oh! dear," he added, with a profound sigh of mingled fear and ecstasy, "what a 'licious plan that part would be! only I am 'fraid it is so desperate naughty that I'll have no fizz in me for the rest of the week. Oh! Jack, suppose nurse catches us!"

"She'll put us to bed," said Jack, "but I think it's worth that, for I do want my knife to be sharpened, and to see the blacksmith's fire."

After this consultation there was but a very slight chance of Harry and Jack spending a happy Monday. The letter, however, which Nell had received, and which was read aloud for the benefit of all the little Humphreys, had a certain effect upon them, for they were warmly attached to their mother; and they could not quite reconcile it to their own minds to be very naughty with the memory of that letter so vividly before them.

This letter made things seem much plainer to Nell, and she was not nearly so unhappy as she had been on Saturday, and she went to her dolls in a comparatively comforted state of mind. Mother had put it to the children's honour to keep as good as possible and she had said,—

"Ask God to help you, my darlings; be sure you ask God to help you."

Nell took Seraphina on her knee, and addressed her anxiously, "Even if I don't get a waxy queen to come and take care of you all, shall you mind it very much, dear Seraphina?"

Seraphina was certainly guilty of a little squeak, indicative of disappointment.

"My darling," said Nell, in her most tender, motherly tones, "I'm most truly sorry, for I know you have set your heart on that beautiful waxy queen, and I made you a lovely new dress with little paper flounces, all done most fashion'ble, and Anna-Maria Jones hasn't bleeded no more bran out of her poor leg, and Topsy was learning to cook beautiful, but I am afraid I



"MY DARLING."

shall never get the waxy queen doll, Seraphina, and I'm desperate sorry for you, my poor dear child."

Seraphina was again heard to utter some squeaks, and Nell thought it necessary for her health to put on her bonnet and the dress with the paper flounces, and take her for an airing in the back nursery.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THAT DELICIOUS FIZZ.

"To Beccles! to Beccles!
To buy a bunch of nettles!"

"*Nursery Rhymes of England.*"

FOR the first two or three days of the next week, perhaps owing to mother's letter, perhaps owing to the weather having suddenly turned mild and pleasant, the children were all tolerably good.

If the twins were letting off steam, they were not doing it in too explosive a manner. Charlie having been assured by Jane that his letter was posted, and on its way to Algiers, was quite happy, and Nell, having given up all vivid hope of her waxy doll, took matters in a resigned manner.

Nurse said afterwards that it was the calm before the storm.

The Thursday of that week was one of those balmy pet days which sometimes come as a foretaste of summer even in the dreary month of December. The children were all out enjoying the delicious mild air, and as nurse always considered them perfectly safe and out of mischief when they were digging in their gardens, she took the baby and paced up and down with him in the south walk.

"Now, Annie," she said to the under-nursemaid, "you may run into the house, and get on with your needlework as fast as you can, for no harm can happen to the children at present."

Annie ran off, and nurse walked slowly backwards and forwards, feeling quite comfortable in her mind.

She heard little voices in the distance, quite cheerful and gay, and she said to herself, "Bless their dear hearts! I hope they're beginning to get over that fad of the poor captain's; it seems a real pity when gentlemen don't explain their meanings proper."

In the meantime the children worked and played. Nell commenced digging the portion of her garden which she had reserved for spring annuals all over again, and Charlie, filling his little watering pot, watered his buried letter assiduously. After pouring three watering-potsful in succession on this one devoted piece of ground, Harry began to make remarks.

"There's nothing growing there, Charlie," he said; "it's 'diculous of you to pour such a heap of water where there's nothing growing, and your asters are all withered up."

"Dere is somesing g'owing here," said Charlie; "dere'll soon be a lickle tee here, and I'll water him if I likes."

"All right," answered Harry, who was too busy with his own operations to pay much more attention to Charlie.

The little fellow patted the wet clay tenderly with his chubby hands, then stood upright, and heaved a profound sigh.

"What is the matter?" asked Nell.

"I'se sinkin' of my gate big wockin' horse," he said.

This remark caused all the children to stop in their gardening, and look at each other.

"Oh! dear," said Nell, "I fear I haven't any chance of that waxy doll."

"I haven't given up, though," said Harry; "I mean to have my day at Aldershot, if I possibly can."

"And I want my box of tools," said Jack.

"But we can't be good," continued Nell; "I try and try, and I seem to get badder, not gooder; and how you did scream this morning, Jack, when you were dressing."

"Oh! it's no matter what I do this week," replied Jack, in a careless tone; "Harry and me, we're fizzing this week, and 'tis no matter what we do."

"Fizzing?" said Nell, in a tone of wonder.

"Yes, we really are," interrupted Harry; "we are soda water bottles this week, and 'tis such fun, and when we have let off all the fizz, why, we'll be dead, and 'twill be quite easy to be good. We haven't let off our big pop-bang yet, but you'll see when we do, won't she, Jack?"

"Tell me," said Nell, coming up close, and looking into their eyes, with her sweet little face raised pleadingly, "what is a fizz and a pop-bang?"

"Yes, dell me," echoed Charlie, flinging down his watering-pot, and dashing up to Nell's side.

"What did 'ou said?' I want 'ou dell what 'ou said."

Thus appealed to, the two boys yielded to temptation, and informed the younger children of the extraordinary plan they had formed for training themselves to win Uncle Dick's prizes. Charlie pronounced it "booful and lobely." Nell, however, shook her head.

"I like fizz," she said, "and I'd love to be a soda water bottle, but I don't think it will make being good any easier next week. Oh! what does Uncle Dick mean?"

"But it must make it easier," continued Jack. "Did you ever see a soda water bottle when all the soda water was out of it? Why, it's all as dead as possible, and that's how we'll be next week. Just the same as if we had desperate bad colds, and was sneezing and coughing every minute. You know you don't care to play great romping, naughty games when you're sneezing and coughing, and have a desperate bad cold in your head, and that's how we'll feel next week." Nell certainly did remember that on the occasions to which Jack alluded she liked nothing so well as to sit wrapped up in a little warm shawl by the nursery fire, and she wondered if a great deal of fizz this week would bring her into a similar condition, and if then it would be quite easy to be good, and tidy, and obedient. She was not sure, however, and stood hesitating, and unwilling to be a soda water bottle on the spur of the moment. Charlie, on the contrary, was in the most vivid state of excitement and delight; he rushed up and down, he tossed his hat in the air, and shouted,—

" I'se doin' to be zeal naughty, so I are!" and then he went up to Jack, and took his hand, and said in a *very* loving tone,—

" I like you, Dack, I do."

But when Jack and Harry, in a sudden access of generosity, proposed that they should all four become soda water bottles on



"HE TOSSED HIS HAT IN THE AIR."

the instant, and go off with a great bang and fizz up the tree, and into the road, and on to the blacksmith's forge, the temptation became too great for Nell to resist; she forgot her poor little scruples, her mother's letter, and those words, which had quite sunk into her heart, about mother trusting to the children's honour, and went in for that delicious fizz with the rest.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE WOMAN, HER GOOD MAN, AND HER BROTHER-IN-LAW.

"How many miles is it to Babylon?
Threescore miles and ten.
Can I get there by candle-light?
Yes, and back again!
If your heels are nimble and light,
You may get there by candle-light."

"Nursery Rhymes of England."



HEN children, however young, come to the resolve to be really naughty, to cast off restraints, and to give themselves up to some forbidden delight or pleasure, it is surprising, for a time at least, how still the little consciences become; how the admonitions of father or mother are forgotten, and how all thought is merged in the daring of the deed they are committing.

Nurse had strictly forbidden the boys ever to climb that special tree which hung over the shrubbery wall, and from which it was quite easy to drop on to the high-road. Nell was only allowed to get on to the lower branches of any tree, for nurse had rather proper ideas as to the conduct of a young lady in these particulars, and Charlie was considered too young to attempt climbing feats. It would be very wrong indeed to go up this tree and to drop on to the high-road, but it would be still worse to walk there alone, without either nurse or Annie; and it would be the height of all



"THEY DID ALL MANAGE TO SCRAMBLE UP."

possible sin and wickedness to go to the forge, and mingle with the rough men who congregated there.

The children knew all these things perfectly; that is, they all did except Charlie, and even he might have guessed that he was a very naughty little boy; but no thought of naughtiness or disobedience, or the evil consequence that might arise therefrom, deterred them now, as, leaving their garden tools without waiting to put them away, they all rushed wildly down through the shrubbery, and towards the tree over which they were to climb. Their four hearts were beating hard, and their cheeks were flushed, and they were in the full zest of their naughty plan.

When they reached the tree, Jack climbed up carefully, and then Charlie was hoisted on to Harry's shoulder, and pushed from behind by Nell; then catching firm hold of a leg which Jack stuck out for the purpose, he managed to get into the tree, though he dropped his cap in his struggles; but that was a matter of minor importance to the children at the present time.

It was more difficult to secure a footing for Nell; and Harry scolded her, and called her heavy and awkward, but at last they did all manage to scramble up, and found themselves on a level with the wall. As Jack had said, there was a branch which hung low on the opposite side, and he and Harry climbed along it and dropped easily to the ground. It took a longer time to get Nell and Charlie down from their elevated perch, but as Charlie was absolutely fearless, and Nell ashamed to show any little qualms of alarm, they too managed to perform this feat after a fashion, and were landed on the high-road without any broken bones. It is true they all made rather a sorry spectacle as they stood there, for they had none of them any gloves on, Charlie's cap was on the other side of the wall, and Jack was in his flannel shirt sleeves, for he had taken off his coat while gardening, and had forgotten all about it in his eager race through the shrubbery.

These minor discomforts, however, were felt not to be of the slightest consequence; the children caught each other's hands and jumped about in ecstasy, for the knife which required sharpening was safe in Jack's pocket, and the village was only a mile away.

"'Tis 'licious on the high-road," said Harry. "Isn't the air fresh and nice out here, Jack!"

"Yes, 'tis zeally booful and fess," remarked Charlie, sniffing about him with the air of a connoisseur.

"Well, let's go along quickly now," said Nell, "let's get to the forge and back again 'fore it's dark; for I'm desperate 'fraid Charlie 'll catch cold without his hat,—oh! dear, and you have no coat, Jack!"

"Bother!" answered Jack; "I'm as hot as possible; I feel all popping and banging inside of me, and 'tis jolly. Now let's run."

They took hold of each other's hand, and went along the road with great speed, but Charlie's fat legs gave way first, and then Nell had to stop for want of breath, and then it suddenly dawned on them that they had taken the wrong turning, and were farther from the village than when they started.

The sun was losing its short winter brilliancy, and the day was decidedly turning chill, when they made this discovery. It was a lonely and little-used road they had got on, and all the landmarks seemed unfamiliar.

"It's extremely provoking," said Harry; "we must all walk back again as fast as possible, and get right. Come along, Charlie."

"I'se tired, I are," said Charlie, standing stock-still and looking not at all inclined to move. At this moment the sound of wheels was heard approaching, and the next instant a cart, drawn by a rough mule, in which two men and a woman were seated, turned sharply round the road, and came up to the children. The moment the man who was driving caught sight of these way-worn little pedestrians, he drew in his reins.

"Why, now, my pretty little dears, what are you all doing at this time in the evening?"

"Oh! please," said Nell, "we wanted to go to the village about a knife, and I'm afraid we've losted our way, and Charlie is so tired."

She spoke in a clear little piping treble, and looked at the people in the cart anxiously; they returned her gaze, and also looked at each other. Then the woman dismounted from the cart.

"Why now," she said, "my good man, my brother-in-law, and me, we're all out on a drive, jest for nothing but pleasure, and we'll take you anywhere as you'd like to go."

"Only not to the village," shouted the man with the reins,—"we can't abear the village, and we won't go there."

"But there are lots of other places a sight better than that little village for having knives sharpened," continued the woman, speaking in a coaxing tone, and bending down by Charlie.

"We'll take you to another pretty town, my little dears."

"A town with a blacksmith's forge in it?" asked Jack; "I don't care for anything but the blacksmith's forge."

"Oh! yes, bless yer heart, lots and lots o' them. Now what town shall we take you all to?"

"The only town I'm a bit anxious to see is Aldershot," said Harry, "and I suppose that's much too far away. Do you know Aldershot, please, woman?" The woman winked at the two men.

"Why, my little dear," she said, "that's real droll, but it was in Aldershot I was born, and it was to that there place we was going when we met you four little mites."

"Oh! dear," exclaimed Nell, "perhaps you know our uncle Dick; his name is Captain Graham, and he's lovely and tall, and he lives in a tent."

"If he lives in a tent I am sure to know him," said the woman, for I, and my man, and my brother-in-law, we lives in a tent too."

"He's an officer, and he lives in a very grand kind of tent," said Nell.

"And he kills lots mens," continued Charlie.

"It would be nice to go to Aldershot," queried Harry, half to himself. "Jack, I had not an idea it was near."

"And we might have the knife sharpened another day," said Jack.

"And Uncle Dick might tell us the real meaning of being good and brave," said Nell.

"Oh! *so* he might, Nell," exclaimed both boys,—"what a splendid, splendid thought!"

"I want go see dat offer what kills lots men 'dain," whimpered Charlie.

"You'll take us to our uncle Dick at once when we get to Aldershot," said Harry, turning to the woman, and assuming what he considered quite manly and business tones.

"Oh! certainly, my dear, certainly," she replied, taking Charlie in her arms and lifting him into the cart.

The others quickly followed his example, and the next instant they found themselves seated on a soft bed of hay, and going away from Hazelbrook as fast as ever the mule could take them.



CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE WAY THE BIRDS FLY.

"See-saw sacradown,
Which is the way to London town?
One foot up, and the other down,
And that is the way to London town."

"Nursery Rhymes of England."



THEY were all tired, and it was delicious to sink into that nice soft bed of dry hay and feel themselves carried swiftly through the air.

They were none of them at all cold either, for the woman seemed quite motherly in her solicitude and care, and fetching from under the straw a great thick tarpaulin, she wrapped it well over and round them, in such a manner that only their heads were visible above it.

They liked this very much, and laughed to think how funny they must look, and they also thought it an extra good joke when the woman desired them, on the occasion of their passing another cart, or even a man or woman on foot, to bob their heads right under the tarpaulin.

"Well, this *is* a pop-bang," said Harry. "I never did know anything more 'licious. I wonder mother never told us that Aldershot was so close. I always fancied that Uncle Dick took nearly a day to come to us from Aldershot. It does seem funny that we should be able to drive there quite easily in a mule cart."

"Oh! Uncle Dick went round," said Nell, "and we're taking a

short cut. Don't you know, Harry, the short cut the post-boy takes to the village? this is the same as that. Isn't this a short cut to Aldershot, please, woman?"

"Yes, my dear, straight as a bird flies."

"Won't Uncle Dick be surprised?" said Jack. "I wonder whether he'll have room for us all in his tent; he always said it was such a little tiny place. I 'spect he'll have to make up beds for us on his dining table, and perhaps Nell and Charlie could be squeezed up into some of the drawers out of his wardrobe."

"I don't mind if I double up my legs ever so," said Nell, "for it would be awfully unkind to take Uncle Dick's own bed, as then he would be tired, and he wouldn't be able to kill the Queen's enemies properly to-morrow."

"He'd get kilt his own self dain," said Charlie, with an air of profound wisdom.

"Yes," continued Nell, solemnly, "we must be very firm about that, and we must all say, the very moment we come in, 'We don't want your bed, Uncle Dick; we'll sleep under the table, or doubled up in two in the drawers, or anywhere else, which is not quite ill-convenient.'"

"Oh, dear!" she added, with a little sigh, "I do hope he'll tell us the right way to get those prizes, for somehow things haven't been at all nice lately."

"Sings have been how'id lately," said Charlie, "and I'se goin' home to mine musser; I'se dedful tired of being with zoo sildrens, I are; and I'se wote letter, and Dedane put him in lickle hole; and I'se going ite to mine musser 'dain."

"Oh, do shut up," said Harry, in a rude voice. "You are always trying to lord it over us—and Jack and me are quite tired of it—aren't we, Jack?"

"Yes," said Jack, "Charlie's only a baby, the youngest of us all 'cept Dick. 'Tis quite 'diculous the way you talk, Charlie; you ought to be very glad to have us big boys to notice you at all."

"And *we* don't care," continued Harry, "if you do go away. Since you came there have been no end of fusses and messes.

Yes, they all did begin just the very first day you were here. If we are not quite happy lately, perhaps 'tis because you are a kind of unlucky fairy—I have read of such things, have not you, Jack? Perhaps," finally added Harry, in a voice of great energy and passion, "we ought to be glad for you to go away."

The blue eyes of the supposed fairy gazed tranquilly, and in a non-comprehending way, back at Harry.

"I'se wote mine letter—and I'se going away from zoo sildrens," he repeated; and then a dreamy look came into his face, for he was thinking of his mother, and trying to fancy that her arms were round him again. Harry's cruel, unkind words had not hurt him in the least.

Nell, however, was hurt, for she was older, and she understood.

"Oh, Harry, how can you speak like that? Our Charlie is not a bad fairy,—he's the dearest, darlin'est, best. 'Tisn't 'cause of him we've had messes. Oh! now he'll want to go away more'n ever, and I *shall* miss him. But perhaps," she added, brightening up, "Uncle Dick will put that right too. Darling Charlie," she continued, coaxingly, "don't mind what Harry says; you may have all my chocolates that are in my little box with the painted cover when we go home; for I *do*—I do love you, Charlie."

"Sanks," responded Charlie. "Only I'se zeally going kite away—and I'se so glad."

Poor Nell gave a deep sigh—then she remembered their journey and its object. They were going to Uncle Dick, who would put all these tangled skeins, which she had failed to arrange, right again.

"Please, woman," she said, "are we near Aldershot now?"

"We are going the way the birds fly; we can't be far off," said Jack.

All this time the cart had been jumbling over very rough and uneven roads, and down unfrequented lanes, and as the mule seemed very strong and went at a great pace, by the time it got dusk the whole party were many miles from Hazelbrook.

At last, going down a shady lane, with deep ruts, over which the cart bumped so fearfully that the children were nearly tossed out, they suddenly emerged on to a common, at one end of which several tents were erected. When Harry saw the tents his heart gave a great bound, and the wild idea flashed through his brain that this must be Aldershot.



The woman, however, quickly dissipated this hope.

"We can't get to Aldershot to-night," she said, "but we'll drive over quite bright and early in the morning; and now you shall all sleep in my tent, and I'll give you some supper."

The cart had drawn up by this time, and several brown-tinted ugly children swarmed out of the tents and surrounded it; some old crones also appeared, and fierce-looking men with long pipes in their mouths. These men, these old women, these dirty children,

had a strange effect upon the elder boys; they instantly felt whatever they called the fizz dying fast out of their little frightened hearts; they instantly knew that they were dreadfully, dreadfully naughty boys, and one pair of eyes told the other pair of eyes that they were with the *gipsies*. Charlie was already nearly asleep, and Nell still kept her faith in the woman, and still believed she was only within a very short distance of her uncle.

Nell had a very confiding way, which few people could resist, and she now put her hand into the woman's and said, "Please, woman, I don't like those funny people with the dark faces; and please, may we all stay quite close to you, and to your good man, and to your brother-in-law?"

"Yes," the woman answered, "they should all come with her; they should spend the night in her tent;" and then she lifted Charlie out of the cart without waking him, and Nell clung to her gown, and the two elder boys followed tremblingly into the smoky dirty tent.

There was a fire made of sticks on the hearth, and an old woman sitting by it—a dreadful-looking old woman, from whom Nell shrank until the woman who brought her in said, in a kind tone, "She's my mother, pretty missy, and she'll be right pleased to welcome you all."

On hearing this, Nell thought it only polite to go up and offer her hand, but instead of accepting it, the old crone suddenly seized hold of her frock, feeling the texture between her finger and thumb.

"Why now, how much did yer give a yard for this, missy? oh, and a silk sash; and how many petticoats has you on? and oh my! what neat little trousers, all done over with nice embroidery! Well, Isabella," she called out, in a loud shrill voice to her daughter, "and are these four children the only supper you 'as brought us home?"

"I 'as more than that, mother," answered the younger woman; "there are two fat hens in the cart, and a hare, and there were a good lot of rabbits in Jim's trap."

The old woman instantly became very cheerful at this news;

she drew Nell towards her and offered to kiss her, which the little girl resented, being very much offended at the way in which her petticoats and neat worked drawers had been pulled about.

"I don't like you," she said; "I think you're a dreadful dirty old woman!" at which the old woman scowled in a fearful manner, and pushed poor Nell away so rudely and roughly that she nearly fell.



CHAPTER XXXIV.

NEW NIGHT-DRESSES

"My dear, do you know,
How, a long time ago,
Some poor little children,
Whose names I well know,
Were stolen away on a winter's day,
And left in a wood, as I've heard people say."

"Nursery Rhymes of England."

THE younger woman laid Charlie down, still asleep, on a bed of dry leaves, and Nell sat by his side, while Jack and Harry stood quite silent behind them.

Nell made up her mind that they were going to have a very disagreeable night, for she felt afraid of the old crone, and the smoke in the tent hurt her eyes, and made her cough. But she had by no means lost her faith in the woman who had brought them there; she still felt quite sure that they were near Aldershot, and that in the morning things would be right, and they would be with Uncle Dick, who would explain to them all about those prizes, and who would write to nurse, and ask her to forgive them for running away.

Nell did not dare to think much about nurse, nor about what mother would say when she heard everything, but she had absolute confidence in Uncle Dick, who, she felt sure, would somehow or other put things right again.

Presently the woman who had brought them into the tent lifted a cover from a great pot which was boiling over the fire,

and out of which a delicious savoury smell instantly came; and filling four pewter bowls with a mixture of something, which seemed like soup, and fish, and fowl, and vegetables, and even bread, all combined, she brought the bowls over to the children. There was a wooden spoon in each pewter bowl, and she desired them to eat up their supper as fast as possible.

The savoury smell even made Charlie rub his eyes and open them wide, and presently he was eating as heartily as the rest.

Nell thought she had never tasted such a delicious supper in her life, and she soon finished all that was in her bowl, and looked



"CHARLIE STILL ASLEEP."

longingly for more, and, of course, Jack and Harry, not having eaten anything for many hours, had not half enough.

But the woman did not offer them any more; on the contrary, she seemed anxious and preoccupied, and kept whispering to her good man, and to her brother-in-law, and to the old crone by the fire, and Nell distinctly heard the words,—

"Lean-to, put them in the lean-to,—and there's no time to lose."

Then the woman came up to the children, and said in a cheerful tone,—

"Now, pretty missy, and little masters, you'll all come to bed, if you please."

"Oh! mayn't we sleep here?" asked Nell; "mayn't we sleep in this tent? You said you would let us."

"Get along this minute!" said the brother-in-law, in a very savage voice. His words quite quenched Nell's supplications, and they all followed the woman tremblingly, except Charlie, who saw no cause for alarm.

The woman brought them to a little shed, against a wall, where there were heaps of dry leaves, and the outer side of which she had covered neatly with a piece of old matting.

"See what a nice bed I have made for you four," she said, "and now let me put on your night things."

"I don't think we want to undress," said Jack. "If we are going so early to our uncle, it isn't worth while."

"I never heard of anything so dirty," said the woman. "Do you think I'd take you in to a grand gentleman like that with all your things messed with lying on? No, no, catch me! I'll fold all your little clothes quite neat and tidy, and brush 'em well, and then you'll look fit to be seen when the cart comes round in the morning."

"Uncle Dick would not like to see us messy when we walk into his tent," said Nell, "for maybe the Queen might be there, giving him orders what he has got to do, and it would be very awkward if we walked in all messy and dirty. I think it very kind of you, woman, to brush our clothes and fold them up tidy, and I'll ask Uncle Dick to give you a present. What would you like him to give you?"

"You must remember, Nell, that Uncle Dick won't have much money left when he has bought us all our prizes," said Harry. "They're very expensive prizes, and they'll take a great lot of the money the Queen gives Uncle Dick."

"But it is kind of you, woman, to brush our clothes," repeated Nell, "and you did give us a delicious supper, though I'd have liked some more; so I wish I could give you something. Oh! are you ıond of dolls, or have you a little girl who loves them

very dearly? I might spare her my darling Anna-Maria Jones. She's a perfect doll, only she bleeds bran out of one leg; I might send you Anna-Maria Jones when I go home again."

The woman looked hard at Nell, in a rather curious way, and then she began hastily to unfasten her warm furs, and to take off



"SHE LOOKED LONGINGLY ALSO AT THE EMBROIDERED LITTLE GARMENTS."

her silk sash, and her blue merino frock, and a warm little eider-down petticoat.

She looked longingly also at the neatly embroidered little garments Nell wore underneath; but glancing up again at the child's face, she hesitated, and then pulling forward something long and dark, and looking wonderfully like a bag, she popped it over her head before she had time to expostulate.

"Oh! what's this?" said Nell; "I don't like it."

"It's the only night-dress I can give you, missy; and see! here are three more for the little gentlemen."

Charlie began to laugh, and said, "Nell looked a duckle finny dirl," and Jack and Harry submitted to having their clothes removed and being slipped into their sacks without a word.

"Now," said the woman, gathering up a great bundle of the children's clothes in her arms, "you have all got to go to sleep, and my brother-in-law, and my good man, will sit down outside the shed door, and if you speak, or make any noise, they won't like it; they're apt to be rough, my good man and my brother-in-law, when they're displeased, so you had better keep quiet, and go to sleep, children."

After this Jack and Harry did not dare to express any of their fears aloud.



CHAPTER XXXV.

THE END OF THE POP-BANG.

"Thumbikin, Thumbikin, broke the barn,
Pinnikin, Pinnikin, stole the corn.
Long-back'd Gray
Carried it away.
Old Mid-man sat and saw,
But Peesy-weesy paid for a'."

"Nursery Rhymes of England."



ERY early in the morning, indeed it seemed quite the middle of the night to Nell, she was awakened by some one vigorously pulling her arm; opening her eyes, she perceived, as well as the dim light would permit, that Harry was bending by her side.

"Hush, Nell, hush! I'm afraid to look, but I *think* I'll peep through a chink in the side of the matting. I wonder if the good-man and the brother-in-law are still there; it would be awful if they came in; they might beat us. Do you know that Jack and me have discovered what they are? *They're gipsies.*"

This last word was said in a hoarse kind of whisper right into Nell's ear; she instantly gave a sharp, short cry, and sat up on her bed of leaves.

"Oh! Harry, and won't they take us to Aldershot?"

"I am 'fraid they won't. I'm 'fraid we're in terrible danger. Jack and me have known it all night, but we couldn't get a

minute to tell you. And oh, Nell, please don't shriek out again in that way, for they are sure to hear you and to rush in and do something desperate to us. You must never anger gipsies; I've always heard that."

"But zey's gone," said Charlie; "I sawed dem long time go. I peeped through lickle hole, and I sawed dem; zee horse, and zee woman, and zee man, and zee sildrens, lots and lots; dey's all gone; I sawed dem mine own self."

The boys stared at Charlie; Nell nearly gasped.

Presently Jack took courage, and tore aside the matting that covered their shed. He could scarcely believe his eyes. The day had come, and the wide common was absolutely desolate. The tents had disappeared; not a human being was in sight; all sign of the gipsy encampment had vanished.

All sign, except that four little children stood abjectly close together in ugly garments made of the coarsest texture, and looked at each other.

"I wants mine becfas," said Charlie, "and oh, where's my knickbockers, and mine lickle zacket?"

Nell made no answer to Charlie, though he turned to her. She sat down on the bed of leaves, and clasped her hands in a despairing attitude.

"We've been dreadful naughty," she said, "and God is punishing us." And then she burst into tears.

Her words and her tears were quite terrible to the big boys. They stood silently by her side, helpless and without a word to say.

"It's true," said Jack, at last, after a silence of several minutes, during which nothing had been heard but poor Nell's distressing sobs.

"It's all as true as possible. That fizz and that pop-bang were just the naughtiest things in the world; and we disobeyed nurse when we swarmed up the tree; and we disobeyed her worse when we dropped on to the high-road, and more worse again when we took each other's hands and ran, and more worse of all when we got into the gipsies' cart; and 'twas a lie the woman

told us about Aldershot; course, no short cut could take us to Aldershot in a few hours; we might have guessed that."

"She said we were going as the birds fly," said Harry, "and they do go very, very straight. Yes, course, 'twas a lie. Oh, what a wicked woman that gipsy must be! but she's not worse than us; we are the wickedest children in the world; we're worse than naughty, we're wicked. When grown people do bad things, they're called wicked, and we have come to that; we're just as bad as if we were grown up. Oh! I don't care about my prize now; I only want mother to forgive me."

"Poor mother!" sobbed Nell; "'twill quite kill mother; and I 'spect nurse's in bed with rheumatiz on the brain, or something awful. Nurse says, when we worry her, that she gets something on her brain, and I think 'tis rheumatiz."

The boys' faces grew longer and longer at these awful prophecies of Nell's.

"I'll never be a soda water bottle again, as long as I live," said Jack; "no bang that ever was was worth this; oh dear, Nell, you don't think mother will die."

"I 'spect she will," said Nell; "I heard her once say that she'd rather die than have us grow up wicked. Oh dear! oh dear! and we are wicked, and, of course, mother's died and gone to heaven."

Heavy tears rose to Jack's eyes, and Harry turned his face away.

It was Charlie's turn to be comforter.

"Heaben's nice place," he said. "People's kite well in heaben—dere's none pain dere. Duckle Nell, wipe wet eyes. Zoo's such a baby, Nell; and mine musser say, when I'se naughty, I'se got to p'ay God. Say oor p'ayers, Nell, and wipe wet eyes."

"You are a good little chap," said Harry, taking him in his arms and kissing him. "Let's all do it, this minute; let's kneel down and tell God all about our fizzing, and our banging, and wanting to be soda water bottles, and being so very, very naughty; and let us ask Him not to let mother die and go to

heaven, and let us do it this very minute. 'Tis such a good thing that God moves about everywhere, and can hear us all the same as if we were in our nursery."

Then the four children knelt down and said a prayer, which, perhaps, men and women would have thought both strange and unfit for God to hear, but to which the angels listened with approval, and to which the Great Father lent a most tender and pitying ear, for He saw the contrition in the little hearts, and



"THERE WAS NO LONGER ANY DIFFICULTY ABOUT BREAKFAST."

these broken children's hearts were a sacrifice quite well-pleasing to Him.

When they stood up after their prayer, they all felt quiet and less unhappy. Nell wiped away her tears, and the boys considered what they should do.

"Our clothes are all stolen away," said Jack, "and we shall have nothing to go home in, except these dreadful ugly brown bags."

"And I want mine becfas," said Charlie, "and oh, what's dat

finny sing over dere?" He ran eagerly towards a stone, at the back of which some embers were smouldering.

On the top of the embers was an old pot, and in the pot some more of the delicious soup which the children had feasted on the night before. What a treat for their little starved morning appetites! A wooden spoon lay by the pot, so there was no longer any difficulty about breakfast. But better things still were in store, for lying on the ground, held securely in its place by four small stones, was a little piece of white paper, and on the paper some words were printed, plainly enough for Harry to make them out. These were the words :—

"*Go across the common to the right; you will find a lane—the lane leads to a village. Go to the inn, and ask them to drive you back to Hazelbrook.*"



CHAPTER XXXVI.

TWO MOTHERS.

"Ladybird, ladybird, fly away home,
Thy house is on fire, thy children all gone,
All but one, and her name is Ann,
And she crept under the pudding-pan."

"Nursery Rhymes of England."



ON that same particular morning two mothers were thinking of their children. One mother, in the warm and sunny climate of Algiers, was reading a little note, badly written, badly spelt, and couched in terms both quaint and absurd. Outsiders thought it a most ridiculous little letter, but the young mother kissed it and blessed it, and I am inclined to think she shed a great many tears over it.

"Oh, Charlie, this is from our wee man, and he wants us so dreadfully; he says he is so tired of being away from us, and he *planted* my letter in his garden; the darling, the dear sweet funny pet. Oh, Charlie, I don't feel as if I could live without him any longer."

"But you are coming back to him in April, my dearest; you are so much better, you know," answered Charlie's father, stooping his tall figure to kiss his pretty wife, "and now, Agnes, it will be Christmas in a fortnight. What shall we send the boy for Christmas?"

"Charlie, how glad I am you remembered; we'll go out and buy lots and lots of things, and send some to the little Humphreys

too. I am so very glad you remembered; he must have his stocking full, just like last year; he thinks Santa Claus really does fill it."

"Well, I am going to send Humphrey some money to buy him a rocking horse; he has begged for one as long as he can remember, and he is quite old enough now."

* * * * * *

The other mother, I grieve to say, spent her morning in a very different manner, for before she had finished dressing, a telegram was put into her hand.

These were the terrible words which this telegram contained:

"*All the children gone except Master Dick. They disappeared about noon to-day, and we can't get trace nor tidings of them except Master Jack's coat and all the gloves, which lie upon the gardens. Come home immediate; we are all doing our distracted best, but fears as 'tis another trick of the Captain's what has quite turned their poor heads.*"

This very voluminous telegram might have had the effect Nell so dreaded upon her poor mother had that mother not been very sensible, and very full of something, alas, not too much known in these days—faith in God. She did turn quite sick and faint, however, and for a moment could scarcely steady her nerves or comprehend nurse's wild words; then, with her husband's help, she packed her things together, and they managed to catch the next train for Hazelbrook.

I cannot help saying here, I hope no little children who read this story will ever give their father and mother as much pain as Mr. and Mrs. Humphrey felt during that journey.

Fly as fast as the train would, it took them several hours to reach the little Hazelbrook station, where the station-master met them with a grave head-shaking, and conducted them sorrowfully to their carriage.

"The police are on the alert, and everything has been done; but there has not yet been any traces, I regret to say, of the poor dear children, madam."

Mrs. Humphrey bowed and drew down her veil, for she could not trust herself to speak, and the children's father desired Jenkins, the coachman, to drive as fast as possible to Hazelbrook.

Suddenly as they turned round towards the well-known gates, they saw coming to meet them a cart, drawn by a lame pony. The cart travelled very slowly, and the driver seemed not at all inclined to whip up his tired beast.

Inside the cart were four funny-looking, brown objects, looking



"FOUR FUNNY-LOOKING OBJECTS."

not unlike potato bags standing on end, except—except that out of one bag popped a golden head, all fluffy and tangly and shiny; and out of another a brown head, with long hair, that surrounded it like a cloud; and out of the remaining two bags might have been seen two little dear close-cropped heads, the shape of which mother knew well.

"Oh, John!" she said, "oh, John! it is the children!" and she sprang out of the carriage before the coachman had time to draw up his horses. The man with the lame pony stopped

with a start, and said "Oh!" in a stupid manner, for the beautifully dressed lady had those four dirty-looking children in her arms and surrounding her. Indeed, it is reported that she sat flop down in the middle of the muddy road, and pressed Nell to her heart and cried over her.

"Oh! mother, mother—you didn't die and go to heaven—you didn't die and go to heaven."

"My darlings, my darlings, what does it all mean?" asked mother.

"We 'came so desperate naughty 'twas all the same as if we had grown up wicked," said Harry.

"But we'll never, never do it any more," said Jack; "no soda water bottles, no pops, no fizzes will ever tempt us again."

"Nesser tempt us 'dain," echoed Charlie, in a voice of profound wisdom and superiority.



CHAPTER XXXVII.

COTTON WOOL.

"Sing, sing, what shall I sing?
Do, do, what shall I do?"

"Nursery Rhymes of England."



OMEHOW for this worst naughtiness the children had no special punishment.

Just the look mother had in her eyes when she kissed them, and just a few words she and father said to them that night, were all the correction they received; but going to bed for days and days, standing in the corner for hours and hours, could never have made so deep an impression.

Jack and Harry worked at their lessons in quite a new way, Nell made painful efforts to be tidy, and Charlie was tolerably obedient, and did not again say "that he was dedful tired of sildrens." Poor nurse breathed freely once more, and tried to hope that this reform would last, though she could not help shuddering at some news her mistress brought her about a fortnight after the gipsy adventure.

Mrs. Humphrey came in with an open letter in her hand to announce the important fact that Uncle Dick was coming to spend Christmas Day at Hazelbrook.

Poor nurse turned very white, and said, "Heaven preserve us," under her breath. She fully expected the children to go almost

off their heads on the spot, but instead of this they were quiet, all except Charlie, who shouted something about his rocking horse, for he was too young to associate this dearly-longed-for possession with conduct good or bad.

"We mustn't say anything about our prizes," said Jack in a sad voice to Harry, "for we haven't earned them, you know."

"I only hope he won't say much about Aldershot," answered Harry; "I don't feel as if I *could* quite bear it."

"You might put cotton wool in your ears," suggested Nell. "You might keep it in a little pill box in your pocket, and then the moment you heard him begin to say Ald—you might pop it in."

"Yes," continued Jack, "that's a very good plan; for me and Nell, and Charlie—we'll like to hear about the camp and the drill, and it seems a pity we shouldn't. Yes, Harry, you get a pill box of wool all ready, and I'll have one too, and so will Nell; and if Uncle Dick talks about knives with three blades, or little saws or hatchets—why, I'll pop my wool in; and though it isn't likely he'll come down to talk about dolls, still, Nell can have hers handy too."

"We must bang the wool in very firm and hard," said Harry. "I believe it is the only plan that we can really bear, for, of course, we must not think of the prizes any more."

"But Uncle Dick will be just as darling without," said Nell; "I'll miss my waxy doll after he's gone, but not while he's here, for I love him so very much just for his own self."

"Well, it's only four days to Christmas," said Harry, "and we'd much better see about getting the pill boxes ready. Nurse, please, have you got four boxes that did hold 'barb pills, and are they all empty, and can you give them to us, please?"

"Oh! Master Harry, what is the mischief now?"

"Indeed, indeed, nurse, we're on honour, you know, and the boxes are to keep us out of mischief."

"We's all honour b'ight," said Charlie, who had heard this expression very often from his own father, and recalled it now with an air of triumph; "we's honour b'ight, we is, and we dusn't

want boxes for none mistiff, but just to pop them in our ears. Uncle Dick 'll say wockin' horse, and I'll pop mine in. And sall we have lickle box to pop into de dear lickle baby's ears too, Haw'y?"

It is grievous to relate that after these confused utterances of Charlie's, nurse positively refused to give the pill boxes.



CHAPTER XXXVIII.

PRESENTS FOR A POOR SOLDIER.

"Ride a cock-horse to Banbury cross,
To see what Tommy can buy;
A penny white loaf, a penny white cake,
And a twopenny apple-pie."

"*Nursery Rhymes of England.*"

THE next day Nell propounded a scheme, which was really considered very brilliant. She proposed that, as there was no chance of their receiving prizes, they should comfort themselves after the manner of a certain text in the Bible.

The text was this, "It is more blessed to give than to receive"; and as they were entitled to receive nothing from Uncle Dick, they should all give him the very best they could for a Christmas box. This suggestion was received with rapturous applause, and the four money-boxes, which stood on the mantelpiece in the nursery, were fetched down and their contents eagerly examined.

Harry's box produced a crooked sixpence, a fourpenny piece with a hole through it, a shilling, which had been quite blackened by falling into the fire one day, and about six pennies.

Jack's money was all in pence, and amounted to elevenpence-halfpenny.

Nell had a nice new florin and two threepenny bits; and Charlie had three farthings and a halfpenny. These four little

heaps of money were placed in four piles on a chair, and the children looked with great satisfaction at each other.

"We can buy him a nice lot of things with all this," said Nell, "and he will be pleased. We can put on the presents: 'From Harry, from Jack, from Nell, from Charlie.'"

"I'se goin' to buy p'esents for *all* de peoples," said Charlie, "for zoo sildrens, and for nurse, and for Dedane, and for all de oders, I are."

"Oh! Charlie," said Nell, "but you've got really so very little money; it would be impossible to buy something for everyone out of a penny-farthing; and it would be much nicer to buy something for dear Uncle Dick. Mother says that officers are not at all rich, and if we could only find out what he is really likely to want, it would be such a help to him."

"I sall buy somesing for Dedane," repeated Charlie, grasping his three farthings and his halfpenny very tight; "Dedane posted mine letter, and she sall have p'esent, 'cause I like she."

After a little argument, however, it was finally settled that, with the exception of purchasing something for Jane, all the rest of the money was to be devoted to Uncle Dick.

Nurse was now called into conference, and she became instantly very good-natured and obliging, and so far entered into the children's scheme that she offered to go herself that very day with Harry and Nell to a small shop in the village, where they could expend their money.

"Only you mustn't tell us anything we're going to buy, nurse," said Harry; "you must let us choose the things our very own selves; for 'tis quite impossible you could know what an officer is likely to want."

Nurse snorted a trifle at this, but finally relapsed again into such a state of complete amiability that she suggested standing outside the shop with her back to the door while the purchases were being made.

It was quite late, tea-time in fact, when the three returned from their expedition. Harry and Nell had flushed cheeks and very bright eyes, and they instantly suggested a private interview

with Jack and Charlie. Nurse allowed them all to retire into the night nursery, where they sat in a circle on the floor.

"We've got a splendid lot of things," said Nell, "it's quite a delicious shop, and that woman seemed to know exactly what officers would want."

"Well, what are they?" exclaimed Jack, impatiently; "me and



Charlie have been having a rather dull time of it, and we want to know what you have done with our money."

"First of all," continued Harry, in a lofty and superior tone, as he produced a rather fat-looking brown paper parcel, "we've bought marbles; we spent sixpence on marbles—real beauties we've bought, and as Uncle Dick always plays marbles with us, and as we've lost all our own, except that brown speckled one which has got a crack in it, why, 'twill save his buying them, don't

you see, for Uncle Dick never *can* do without his game of marbles."

"Yes, yes," said Jack, "that's a very good plan; we'll look at the marbles afterwards."

"Here's a nice woollen comforter for his throat," said Nell; "it's blue and green mixed, and the woman said 'twas a most likely thing for an officer to want, 'cause of going out suddenly at night to kill the Queen's enemies. He won't have a sore throat now, poor Uncle Dick; and isn't it a lovely comforter?"

"Yes, it's kite booful," said Charlie. "What's 'ou buy out of my money, Nell? what's 'ou buy for Dedane?"

"Oh! Charlie, your money was most difficult, 'cause there was so little, but the woman was really *very* clever over it. We consulted her, and we've got two dear little tiny parcels for Uncle Dick, and a little round bobby parcel for Jane. You mustn't open Jane's parcel too often, for 'twill get so sticky; it's a sweet, it's one large, round farthing sweet. There's peppermint in it, and it's very good."

"And what's in de oder lickle parcels?" enquired Charlie.

"They're not quite as interesting, but they are very useful; you mustn't open one of them either, or you're sure to sneeze, for it's pepper. There's pepper in one and salt in the other, and they're for Uncle Dick to put in his eggs at breakfast time. The woman said the pepper would last for months, and he needn't buy any, so think what that'll save."

"Now come on and look at the other things," exclaimed Harry, impatiently. "Here's some peas, in case he should like to do pea-shooting, and Nell would spend sixpence on Pears' soap, 'cause the woman said 'twas so good for shaving, and we've got him a toothbrush, and two red-spotted pocket-handkerchiefs. I think that's all, except—oh! dear yes, a little packet of carraway seeds to make cakes with, 'cause he's so very fond of cakes."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

GIVING THE PRIZES.

"I bought a pipkin and a papkin—
A slipkin and a slapkin,
A nailboard, a sailboard,
And all for a farthing."

"Nursery Rhymes of England."

CHRISTMAS Day came, and late, very late the night before, Uncle Dick arrived at Hazelbrook, too late for any of the children to see him, though not too late for them to dream about him in a confused medley, in which he was giving them prizes, and they were giving him prizes, and they were both naughty and good, and everything was both right and wrong.

The four children awoke in the morning to the delightful fact that the happiest day in the year had come, and that their hero had arrived.

As there was to be a great treat and a feast in the evening, no special distribution of presents was to take place before that hour; but Nell and Harry, and Jack and Charlie, decided that their own especial prizes for Uncle Dick were to be given to him in private, and at an early hour in the day.

"For we couldn't possibly keep the secret banged up inside of us all that time," said Harry; "'twould be all the same as being soda water bottles over again."

"Oh! don't talk about soda water bottles," said Nell; "they make me feel *so* sad."

"Well, well, Nell, I suppose your being a girl makes you a little foolish about some things; but anyhow I can't keep my secret about Uncle Dick longer than till after breakfast. Fancy him wanting his marbles all day, and we knowing that we had them."

"Or he might take a wish to try the pop-gun, down in the school-room," said Jack, "and there's a whole bag of peas waiting for him."

"And oh—oh—oh!" here almost shrieked Nell, "he'll be shaving about now, and he hasn't got his Pears' soap—oh! dear, and the woman said it was the only kind to use in cold weather, and 'tis quite bitter to-day—oh! poor Uncle Dick!"

"Here him comes, and him sall have him's pepper," said Charlie as the door opened, and a closely cropped soldier's head peeped round, and two merry blue eyes smiled a welcome and a Christmas greeting, and all kinds of blessings to the children.

"My own darling Uncle Dick!" said Nell in a voice of rapture. The two elder boys getting very red in the face, and glancing at each other, exclaimed,—"He shall have his presents this very minute, he shall," and then they rushed wildly into the night nursery, Charlie scampering after them.

Uncle Dick, feeling slightly surprised at the sudden desertion of his nephews, sat down by the fire and took Nell on his knee. "Well, nurse, so you got my letter all right, and things haven't turned out so very badly as we feared. Oh! yes, your mistress has been telling me all about it, and I feel penitent enough, I assure you. So, that's my namesake. Well, old fellow, and what mischief have you been up to?"

"He's the only one of the children, sir, who 'as behaved hisself, and I will say, I never saw a better baby."

Nurse's rather severe words were interrupted. There came a rushing, and a scampering, and a rustling, and the sound of paper parcels falling bang down upon the floor, and being picked up with exclamations, and then Jack, Harry, and Charlie appeared, Charlie leading the van and exclaiming breathlessly,—

"Here we's are, and deys all for *zoo*;" and on the table, close

to Uncle Dick, a pile of packets of many sizes and shapes were poured.

"We haven't got the prizes," said Nell, in a low voice. "You remember you promised me a waxy doll."

"And me a day at Aldershot," said Harry.

"And me my box of tools," exclaimed Jack.

"I do want my g'ate big wockin' horse," Charlie began to whimper.

"But we haven't got them," continued Nell, "we haven't been good, so we haven't earned our prizes; and we were very sad about it, Uncle Dick, and we were afraid we should have to put cotton wool in our ears until we thought of this 'licious plan."

"We are some of the more-blessed-to-give-than-to-receive people, so *you're* to have prizes, Uncle Dick."

"Dear me!" said Uncle Dick, "this is most exciting *and* unexpected; and are all these brown paper parcels really for me?"

"Deys zeally are," said Charlie; "aren't they lots and lots? Open dem, do open dem."

"There are marbles here," continued Harry; "we thought they'd be useful; and Nell would get this comforter. I don't suppose you care to mess up your throat with such things; however, here it is."

"It's so soft, Uncle Dick," said Nell, feeling it with her little fingers; "and oh! I hope you have not shaved yet, for this is Pears' soap, and the woman said it was the right thing for the skin and the 'plexion; but I am dreadful 'fraid you have, for your cheek is so smooth."

"Well, I did this morning, Nell. I'm ever so sorry, but I didn't know about the Pears' soap; I'll put this cake straight into my shaving-tin. I'm sure, children, I'm awfully obliged to you all."

"And you will wear the comforter when you're out killing the Queen's enemies," said Nell.

"Well, my dear, I promise never to lose it at least; but now, what are in the other parcels?"

"Oh, peas in this one," said Jack, "peas for pea-shooting; and a tooth-brush here, as you're sure to want a lot of tooth-brushes; for nurse says you've got such white teeth 'cause you wash 'em *every* time you go to your bedroom, and that must wear out heaps of brushes: and Harry and me wish you wouldn't, for nurse wants us to do the same. Harry and me don't want to have white teeth. Then we bought two beautiful spotted pocket handkerchiefs for you to wear at dinner parties; and carraway seeds, 'cause Nell thought you would be sure to love 'em in cakes; and—and——"

"But there's a very funny round little sticky parcel just by my elbow," said Uncle Dick; "what does it hold?"

Here Charlie gave a shriek. "Dat's for Dedane," he said; "dat's for mine Dedane; zoo's not to eat him; him's her lickle 'weet. Dere's pepper dere, and salt for zoo's egg; does 'ou like pepper in zoo's egg? I don't like pepper; him make me neeze."

"Don't you think," continued Nell, in an anxious tone, "that you'll be saved a great lot of money now, Uncle Dick? That's what we were hoping, for we know that you're so dreadfully poor; and now you won't have to buy marbles, nor peas, nor pocket-handkerchiefs, nor tooth-brushes, nor cakes for such a long time."

"To say nothing of pepper and salt, Nell. I assure you I feel as well off as if I had attained my majority;" and then, rather to the children's surprise, Uncle Dick, after kissing them all round, suddenly rushed out of the room; and there was a sound in the distance, very like—only, of course, that was impossible, but it really was remarkably like—an extremely merry fit of laughter.

CHAPTER XL.

A GATE BIG WOCKING HORSE, AND OTHER DELIGHTS.

" On Christmas Day,
My true love sent to me
Twelve lords a-leaping,
Eleven ladies dancing,
Ten pipers piping,
Nine drummers drumming,
Eight maids a-milking,
Seven swans a-swimming,
Six geese a-laying,
Five gold rings,
Four colly birds,
Three French hens,
Two turtle doves, and
A partridge in a pear-tree."

"Nursery Rhymes of England."



ERTAINLY that was a merry Christmas Day.

The laughter, the smiles, the jokes, the talk, the universal feeling of goodwill and good fellowship, knew no bounds. Uncle Dick and father and mother were quite like children themselves.

The snow lay on the ground, the sun sparkled, the villagers trooped up to the house to go away by no means empty-handed—in short, it was an ideal Christmas Day.

But the children's hour—the crowning hour, was to come. Uncle Dick was putting the finishing touches to his toilet, had carefully wedged Nell's Pears' soap into his shaving case, and was looking with interest and a certain wholesome fear at the

very severe bristles of his new tooth-brush, when there came a light tap, rather low down, on the panels of his door.

He said, "Come in"; the handle was softly turned, and two little figures dressed from head to foot in white, and holding each other's hands, tripped gaily forward. Round the fair head of the smallest figure clustered a perfect crown of buttercups—



buttercups looking so like the real flowers, that Uncle Dick felt as if a bit of the spring had come suddenly into his room.

Buttercups filled the dimpled hands, and were scattered here and there over the white sailor dress.

The other little figure, with its dark eyes, and mass of cloudy hair, was decked with daisies. Daisy wreaths were round her

neck, and round her hair, and festooning her frock. Holding their flowers in their hands, they danced up to Uncle Dick, and the fair child, raising his blue eyes, said in a high-pitched voice,—

"P'ease, I'se Golden Hair—I'se fai'y—and Nell's fai'y. Nell's Nut B'own Maid—we're both fai'ies—and I'se got voice like Silver T'umpet, and p'ease shut 'ou eyes, 'cause we's goin' to take you into Fai'yland."

"We really are, Uncle Dick," said Nell, in a serious voice; "and don't you like our fairy dress? Only Charlie is so funny; he didn't care for all the bread-and-butter cups that mother took so much trouble to get. I am really 'fraid Charlie hasn't got good taste at all, 'cause he said he'd rather have dandy-oh-lions."

"'Cause deys more leller," said Charlie; "I likes sings leller, I do."

"Well, but now please shut your eyes up very tight, Uncle Dick, and don't open them till we tell you."

Uncle Dick did what was required of him, walking carefully along the passages, and down several flights of stairs, led by the fairies Golden Hair and Nut Brown Maid, who inspected the position of his eyelashes several times.

At last they entered a room, where the light was both bright and soft, and where some very dainty tinkling music might have been heard.

"Zoo's in Fai'yland—open zoo's eyes," shouted Charlie, and Uncle Dick gladly availing himself of this permission, and lifting the fairy Nut Brown Maid on to his shoulder, began to inspect this enchanted region.

It was very difficult to recognise the boys' schoolroom in its transformed guise.

The walls were nearly covered with evergreens and flowers, and hidden skilfully among the flowers and leaves were several little musical boxes, all wound up to keep time, tune, and harmony.

Tables laden with flowers and leaves were everywhere; these flowers and leaves being only meant as a covering for more solid treasures.

In the middle of the room was the crowning sight—a lovely tree frosted with silver, and glittering with many colours. This tree groaned under its weight of fairy-like gifts, and it was the soft light from its many wax tapers which dazzled Uncle Dick as he came forward.

Father and mother, and Jack and Harry and baby Dick, and all the servants from nurse to "Dedane," were present; and every one smiled, and when the children clasped hands and danced round the tree, cook exclaimed, wiping the tears from her eyes,—

"That never, never did she see a more truly h'edifying and beautiful sight."

"Just one word, children," said Uncle Dick, "just one word before you're all made very rich and very happy. The presents that have not been earned are not here; they may come; the children who really win them shall have them, and we can talk about that another time. But from quite another source, one little child in the room has attained his great wish; and I'm sure Nell and Harry and Jack, who have been able to kiss father and mother so many times to-day, will rejoice with the little man whose own father and mother are so far away, but who have not forgotten him. Here, come along, Golden Hair." And before any one could say a word, Charlie was seized in Uncle Dick's arms, and carried round to the other side of the tree, where a rocking horse, with arched neck and flowing mane, and a gentle soft eye, all fully equipped for his sturdy little rider, stood waiting on the most beautifully-balanced pair of rockers in the world.

"Mine g'ate big wockin' horse," exclaimed its happy possessor. "Oh! come 'long, Nell; we'll wide all day and all night, and forever'n and ever'n, and ever'n, now."

But it is quite impossible to describe all that this wonderful fairy room possessed; suffice it to say that that night Nell, besides an armful of other treasures, had six additions to her nursery, and though none of them were quite altogether waxy dolls, yet this sudden increase to her cares gave her some anxiety as well as pleasure.

When I explain that two of the dolls came in the guise of

babies, lying down each in its own cradle, this can scarcely be wondered at.

Harry had a model of Aldershot, with its camp, and its soldiers at drill, and he took a long time trying to discover Uncle Dick amongst them.

Jack had a pop-gun, which went off with such a bang that nurse put her hands up to her ears.

Of course there were heaps and heaps of other things, presents and presents for everyone, until at last everyone got tired, and grown-up people and children alike began to think that even of this shower of good things there might be enough.

But that night Jane was heard to say that she should never care for anything more than she did for Charlie's little sticky sweet, and Uncle Dick, before he went to bed, looked tenderly at the comforter which Nell's soft fingers had touched.



CHAPTER XLI.

HOW GOLDEN HAIR AND NUT BROWN MAID MIGHT HOPE TO WEAR REAL BUTTERCUPS AND DAISIES.

"Buttercups and daisies—
Oh the pretty flowers."

"God love the little children,—
The angels at the door;
The music sweet of little feet
That patter on the floor."

Page Hopps.



"IT is absolutely necessary, my dear Dick, it is absolutely necessary, that seeing you possess such an influence in our nursery, you should explain to your most devoted little subjects exactly what you wish them to do. I assure you," continued Mrs. Humphrey, half tearful, half smiling, "that during the last two months we have undergone absolute terrors, and the children have had more than hairbreadth escape. Always the same story has been on every pair of lips, 'It is Uncle Dick—it is because of Uncle Dick.' The children could not have a better guide—only do let them know exactly how they are to follow you."

"My dear Eleanor, as you are aware, nothing can exceed my penitence. I am a dreadful lecturer, and I hate the task, particularly when the darlings are so bright and affectionate—

however, needs must, and I'll be off to the nursery this very moment, and tackle them one by one."

It was extraordinary how that day was spent. First Harry disappeared with Uncle Dick—then Jack—then Nell, and even at last Charlie; and each child came back with a bright and yet a serious little face.

At night, before they went to bed, they said a few words to each other.

"It's going to be in the spring-time now," said Harry, "somewhere about May, Uncle Dick thinks; and the drills are always splendid then; I don't mind putting it off, now that I know the way to get it."

"And I can chop away at the trees and the twigs, and lop off the dead branches, when my box of tools does really come," continued Jack. "In the spring a box of tools like mine will be a great help in the garden."

"And I'll crown my waxy dolly with *real* bread-and-butter cups and daisies," said Nell; "and Charlie and me will be fairies once again, and have flowers all over us. Oh! I am so glad we've to have our prizes in the spring-time."

"And mine musser and mine dadda will be home den," said Charlie; "and mine lickle letter will come t'ee den. Evdysing will be all wite den."

"Yes," continued Nell, "Uncle Dick says that his father and mother coming home will be the best prize of all for Charlie. And I told Uncle Dick how much I loved Charlie; and that we all loved him, even Jack and Harry, though they do say he tries to bully them: and Uncle Dick laughed and said such a funny thing. He said, 'Oh! Charlie's an Autocrat, and can make people do what he likes.' I asked Uncle Dick how Charlie, being the littlest, could be that funny word, and do all that; and he said, 'Perhaps 'tis his eyes, perhaps 'tis his voice, perhaps 'tis his hair.' Then I knew; and I clapped my hands and said, 'No, no, no; 'tis just 'cause he's a darlin', and we love him—that's why.'"

"Charlie's not bad," said Harry, gazing very hard and straight

at Nell, and wondering at her excitement. "I s'pose we do love him, though there's no call to make such a fuss."

"And I like zoo sildrens now," quietly proclaimed the little hero under discussion.

"But do let's think of the prizes," continued Jack. "They are to come in the spring time with the flowers. I'm glad they'll come when our gardens are gay with flowers."

"Uncle Dick says we're all like flowers ourselves," remarked Nell, "and he says we mustn't have any weeds near us, and the way is to ask God."

"Let's ask Him now, then," said Harry.

So they all knelt down, and the four, after their own fashion, repeated his or her evening prayer.

"Suffer me to come to Dee," were the last words heard, and they were Charlie's.



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